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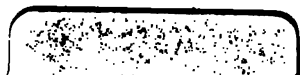
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CHARLES FELTON PIDGIN

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# THE HIDDEN MAN



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# THE HIDDEN MAN

A NOVEL

BY

CHAS. FELTON PIDGIN

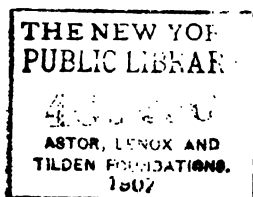
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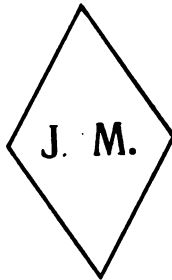
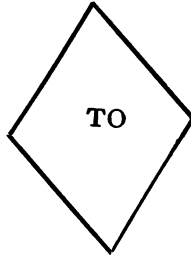


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# The Hidden Man

## CHAPTER I

### A RELIC OF COLONIAL DAYS

NOT many miles from Boston is the sleepy little town of Riverdale. Delightfully situated along the banks of a small river, in a somewhat hilly country, it has more than a local reputation as a health resort, and many Boston people go there each summer for rest and recreation. Riverdale is also noted for its many fine, old, colonial residences. There are many handsomer, and more pretentious houses, of modern build in this little town, but in natural beauty of surroundings, historic interest, and ancient lore, these specimens of old-time architecture are preëminently the first.

Chief among the latter is the Parrott homestead. On a quiet side street away from the beaten line of travel, it stands upon a slight eminence, its substantial squareness of outline half hidden by trees. A large, sloping lawn, with here and there a fine old tree breaking the smoothness of its outline, surrounds three sides of the house. In the rear is a garden, with prim, box-bordered flower beds, in which flourish hardy, old-fashioned shrubs and plants, that send forth the perfume of their variegated blossoms to the delight of the busy bee and the fluttering butterfly. A narrow path, bordered by lilac bushes, leads from the road up through the lawn to a wide, green doorway, with white, fluted columns. Around this doorway, on a trellis, clammers an old rose vine whose pink flowers, in the long ago, whispered and nodded to many a sweet lass in hoops and flowered petticoats, as she tripped blithely across the hospitable threshold.

Within, a long, narrow hallway extends through the house to the back door. On each side of this are two large,



square rooms. The two on the west side, commonly known as the show-rooms, are furnished with quaint, mahogany furniture and other relics of colonial times, which have been, for years, the delight of visitors and the envy of art collectors. Among these antiquities is a tall mahogany cabinet, half desk, half bookcase, whose double doors, with their many diamond-shaped panes, disclose to view their old volumes and priceless treasures. In the centre of one room, a round, graceful table, dark and polished with age, holds a dainty burden of frail china cups and saucers from which many a silver-haired dowager, in stiff brocade, sipped fragrant tea as she gossiped under the gold-framed pictures, while the tall clock, which even now ticks drowsily in the corner, stood sentinel over all.

Muslin curtains of modern date flutter at the open windows, wherein steals the spicy odor of the neighboring pines, and over all radiates the warm sunshine, bathing in a golden light these relics of bygone days.

The first owner of this estate was a sturdy patriot named Parrott, who, at the first outbreak of war with the mother country, organized and drilled a company of stalwart men, and at their head marched from this peaceful domain to fight for the freedom of his native land. It has been said that in the early summer, shortly after Farmer Parrott went to war, two straggling soldiers met by accident on his lawn and there fought, one for England, the other for America. This duel was witnessed by Polly, the young and pretty daughter of the house, who, returning from a walk in the fields, came upon the contestants just as one fell, mortally wounded. Pale and trembling she ran to the fallen man only to find him beyond all human aid.

"Go!" she cried scornfully, to the other combatant who stood gazing at the body of his victim, "and may God forgive you for this uncalled-for bloodshed."

The young man shrank back guiltily, her look of horror communicating itself to his face. He turned quickly, and his blue and buff uniform was soon lost to view disappearing behind the high bushes that skirted the road.

Late that night, Polly and her faithful black servant, Sam, buried the soldier near the spot where he fell. The gentle girl dropped a tear upon his face as she offered up a silent prayer for this stranger, who, with his red uniform for a shroud, lay in an unknown grave in an alien land. Long after, when peace was declared, Polly's father returned wounded but victorious, with the rank of Captain. But it was many days before his daughter could bring herself to speak of the unmarked grave upon the lawn.

On a warm summer day in our own time, two women walked slowly up and down this lawn. The elder was stylishly gowned in dark blue silk which rustled aggressively as she walked. Her gray hair was coiled high upon her head in the latest fashion and in one hand she carried an ear trumpet, with which—when not otherwise in use—she punctuated her remarks by majestically flourishing it in a manner that would put a drum major to shame. In direct contrast was her companion, who might have stepped from out one of the gold-framed pictures within the house, so ethereal in dress and demeanor was this fair, young maid.

"Of course you will accept Mr. Blumenberg," said Mrs. Mowry, in an emphatic, clarion-like voice, which gave one the impression that its owner was a stranger to contradiction. Indeed, this self-opinionated woman was, as a rule, so busy contradicting people that she gave them little chance to contradict her.

"But I do not love him," gently expostulated her daughter.

"Love?" sniffed Mrs. Mowry: "A mighty poor investment. Thank goodness I married for money! And if it wasn't for that unfortunate investment of your poor dead father, we might still be rich. Ah, it was sad."

Mrs. Mowry emitted a long sigh. Not knowing exactly what occasioned it, Louise made no comment.

"Mr. Blumenberg," continued Mrs. Mowry, "is wealthy, good looking, with a foreign name that reminds me of—"

"The Hartz Mountains," volunteered Louise.

"No, the River Rhine, with its castles and—"

"Lager beer breweries," her daughter added.

"Baronial halls," snapped the irate lady, with a pronounced flourish of her ear trumpet. "You can't but respect him," she argued.

"But I do not love Mr. Blumenberg," reiterated Louise. "Pshaw! Respect will outlast love."

Louise turned abruptly away as though to end the conversation, and sank wearily on a rustic bench which stood invitingly within the shade of a little vine-covered arbor.

Mrs. Mowry paused in her walk and bestowed a withering glance upon her offspring, who, with uplifted face, gazed wistfully at the leafy canopy of a neighboring elm, which caressingly tossed its giant branches high in the air toward the deep, blue sky. Her dress, of soft, white material, fell in graceful folds about her slight figure. The broad, blue ribbon, swathed about her small, round waist, rivalled the color of her eyes which seemed to take on an even deeper blue by the contrast of her golden hair. All this girlish beauty and grace, however, was for the moment lost upon Mrs. Mowry, who noticed only the firm set of her daughter's round chin, which sign, she knew from past experience, to be indicative of great combativeness in a usually placid nature.

As caretaker of the Parrott estate, a genteel but not highly lucrative position, Mrs. Mowry had assumed much of the Parrott pride, little of its tolerance, and none of its patriotism. She was fond of money and power, likewise of foreigners. Indeed, she frequently confessed she did not care for Americans. "Too thin and sallow" she would sententiously add. And now, at the first golden opportunity—in the person of Mr. Blumenberg—to indulge her ambitions, to gratify her wishes, her child, her only child, seemed determined to balk her.

As she stood meditatively gazing at her daughter, an unsuspecting spider undertook a tour of inspection of the worthy lady's dress. She made a vicious jab at it with her ear trumpet. The unfortunate insect made a desperate

jump, triumphantly landed on the rim of the trumpet and immediately proceeded to seek a hiding place within. With a shriek Mrs. Mowry flung it off. "Why, Louise," she gasped, "what if that horrid daddy-long-legs had got into my trumpet!"

No answer being vouchsafed by her daughter, who sat in the listless attitude of a disinterested spectator, Mrs. Mowry snapped out: "Pythias Prince shall come here no more."

At these words Louise's form straightened, and into her eyes came a frightened, appealing look, which was entirely lost upon her mother, who, after delivering this verbal shot majestically strode across the lawn and disappeared within the house.

Louise knew that her mother could not force her to marry Mr. Blumenberg, but she dreaded the long, petty warfare that would be the ultimate outcome of his proposal. She was sure that she would be forced each morning to patiently argue, logically plead and truthfully sum up her case, only to have her mother, at the end of the day, complacently issue from the fray with unchanged mind and ready on the morrow to begin the argument anew. Louise sighed at the very thought of such a conflict. The sound, slight as it was, frightened a friendly grasshopper who had perched upon the tip of her shoe. She watched him leap away into the sunlight, and as she buried her face in her hands, she could not help envying the pretty green-winged creature the freedom of its careless life.

"Are you in trouble?" asked a soft voice in her ear.

She looked up, and was startled to see a tall, thin, forlorn looking woman standing beside her.

"Where did you come from?" involuntarily broke from Louise's lips. "These are private grounds. Do you want to see my mother?"

"No, no," hastily answered the woman, a slight flush mantling her pale cheeks. "Your mother? Why, then, you must be Louise Mowry." She gazed earnestly into Louise's face, which had flushed at this unexpected meeting. "Surely, child, you can have no cause for sorrow."

Louise vainly tried to keep back the tears which sprang to her eyes at the sound of the low, sympathetic voice and for one wild, foolish moment, she longed to lay her tired head upon the breast of this motherly woman, whose tenderness was in such marked contrast to her own mother's austere inflexibility. Not that her mother was unkind—far from it, but they did not understand each other.

"Are you in trouble?" repeated the woman.

Louise evaded this question by another one. "Are you?" she gently asked, noting the air of refinement and the traces of former beauty of her strange visitor.

The woman laid a small, white hand on Louise's shoulder and started to speak, when suddenly the sound of footsteps was heard crunching up on the gravel walk. A joyful smile broke over Louise's face. The woman's glance, quick as lightning, followed the direction of Louise's gaze, and rested upon the boyish figure of a young man who could be seen between a break in the lilac bushes; then she turned and quickly walked away. Louise ran forward, utterly forgetting her companion in her haste to greet her lover, Pythias Prince.

## CHAPTER II

### A DAUGHTER FOR SALE

"PYTHIAS!" called Louise.

At the sound of her voice Pythias turned and eagerly crossed the lawn to meet the girl who had stolen like a beam of sunshine into his gloomy life. He took her outstretched hands in his, gently, as if he were almost too conscious of her delicate beauty. At the sight of her tear-stained face, the smile that lighted up the sombre beauty of his countenance quickly faded away.

"What is the matter?" he anxiously inquired, as, seating himself upon a nearby bench, he drew her down beside him. "Has your mother been arguing again?"

"Oh, Pythias, mother wants me to marry Mr. Blumenberg."

"No, no, not that—your mother would never do that. Why you are engaged to me," he protested. Now I know why she has treated me so coldly of late," he added, thoughtfully.

"It's all on account of Mr. Blumenberg's money."

"Of course, a penniless student is not much of a catch for a beautiful young girl," commented Pythias with bitterness.

"When this beautiful young girl"—and Louise bestowed upon him a smiling nod—"complains of that, it will be time enough for you to do so."

"But your mother? It is very easy to see that she has forgotten her love for her old schoolmate—my mother. Poor dear, her friends soon forgot her. Oh, Louise, when I think of all she has suffered. She gave up home and friends for love, and her sacrifice was rewarded with poverty, intemperance, desertion—"

Louise laid a warning finger on his lips to stem his tide of words.

"Don't, Pythias," she entreated. "You hurt me. Your mother took your father for better or for worse. No doubt, even if she knew what her life would be with him—loyal woman that she was—she would have married him just the same. Women are not apt to be reasonable when they are in love." Louise sighed for the weakness of her sex. "And you must remember that she had you to comfort her," she added proudly.

"I remember only too well—what she suffered for my sake," he answered gravely. "I shall never forget how hard she worked to send me to college. And think of it, she did not even have the pleasure of seeing me a doctor."

"But she had the consolation of knowing that her one true friend, Judge Adams, would help you," eagerly interposed Louise.

Pythias nervously drew his hat over his eyes as if to hide the hopeless look that had settled down upon his face like a pall.

"Dearest," he said, after a while, in a broken voice, "I grow fearful at times. What if I should follow in my father's footsteps?"

"Pythias Prince!" Louise removed his hat the better to gaze into his face reprovingly. "I am ashamed of you. You are actually growing morbid! Your father drank, but not until poverty came. He deserted your poor mother, it is true, but he could not have realized how cruel he was. He could not have realized that a good woman will love a man long after she knows he is unworthy of her love. Perhaps he thought she would be better off without him; and she was. Your father was weak but not wicked." Her voice sank almost to a whisper. "Let the dead rest in peace."

"You dear little girl," laughed Pythias, his anger melting beneath this ray of sunshine, "I believe your charity would coin an excuse even for a criminal. I ought not to be downcast with such a good fairy to comfort me."

"Miss Louise!" at that moment called a fresh young voice, and across the lawn tripped a bright-eyed girl, her brown curls flying in the summer air.

"Excuse me," she said, coming toward Louise, "but your mother says that you ought to help Aunt Jane pack. They are going on the 3.30 train and it is now past two."

"I will come in a few minutes," replied Louise. "And, Minerva, you had better make a bouquet for Aunt Jane. Say that I sent it to her. Do you understand?"

"I understand perfectly," answered Minerva, with a sly, significant wink at Pythias.

Pythias caught her roguish glance and smiled indulgently. She laughed merrily and ran lightly towards the garden. When she reached the piazza, in her exuberance of spirits she executed an impromptu dance, then disappeared like a miniature whirlwind behind the house.

"Isn't Minerva pretty?" asked Pythias, highly amused at her exhibition of animal spirits. "What possessed her parents to give her such an odd name?"

"For the same reason your parents gave you yours, I suppose," answered Louise, absently.

"Judge Adams really named me, for if his son had not been named Damon, my father would never have called me Pythias."

"And you two are Damon and Pythias in reality—since renewing your friendship at college," said Louise. "Dear Damon, I shall never forget that he was the cause of our meeting. Why, here's Uncle Jim!" then added to herself: "He must have come in by the back gate—the way that woman came," remembering for the first time the strange disappearance of her mysterious visitor, whom, in her excitement, she had entirely forgotten.

"Yes, here I am," puffed a short, stout man. "Oh, company, I see." A smile broke over his red face. "Never mind me, keep on with your billing and cooing. No offense, sir. I am Louise's Uncle Jim, and I love her as much as if she was my own daughter." With this remark, he bestowed a hearty smack on that young lady's



cheek. "Where is your aunt? I bet nothing is packed up and she is sitting on a sofa reading a novel."

"Uncle Jim, this is Mr. Prince, a friend of mine," said Louise, when her uncle paused for breath.

That good-natured individual extended a pudgy hand and warmly grasped the one Pythias held out to him.

"Glad to see you, sir," he remarked. "My name is Jim Kent, a retired fish dealer. The smell is off my hands and clothes and out of my hair by this time. Haven't handled a raw mackerel for ten years. Strange, isn't it? I never did like to eat fish. I liked to sell them and buy beef with the money." His fat sides shook with laughter. "Got a cold, sir?" he suddenly inquired. "Your nose and eyes look red. Take care of yourself, young man. Well, good-bye, good-bye, I must go and hurry up Jane, or we'll lose the train." And off he trotted.

"Dear Uncle Jim," said Louise, as she gazed after his retreating figure, "he loves me. Aunt Jane cares more for Minerva; which reminds me that I ought to go and help her. I will go to the gate with you."

Hand in hand they walked down the path. At the gate, within the shelter of the lilac bushes, they paused. She gazed entreatingly up into his face, which had grown grave again at the thought of their parting. She placed her hands tenderly upon his shoulders.

"Cheer up," she whispered; "Damon may be able to help us—mother is so fond of him. I will never marry Mr. Blumenberg. And whatever happens, no one, not even my own mother, can prevent my loving you."

"I will work hard for your sake. And if I succeed?"

Her hands tightened on his shoulders, and her voice trembled. "When you say you want me, when you need my care, I will leave all for you."

Into his eyes came a light that seemed to transfigure his whole countenance. "You are mine, mine," he cried, exultantly. "Nothing can part us. My faith in you—"

"Is only exceeded by my trust in you."

His head bent low, and reverently he kissed her hair.

"Go," she urged; "I hear mother's voice."

Wafting him a kiss, she sped, light as air, up the path and around the front of the house to the piazza, where in a big, wicker chair, her mother sat bolt upright, impatiently awaiting her.

"Well, he has gone at last, has he?," commented that lady, upon her daughter's appearance. "I hope you told him what I said."

At this momentous question, Louise, with a sinking at her heart, sat down upon the edge of the low piazza and braced her back against a pillar to await the coming ordeal.

"Of course, he is not coming here again," ejaculated Mrs. Mowry, with an emphatic wave of her ever present trumpet.

"I did not suppose, mother, you really meant to forbid Pythias the house."

"Yes, and the garden too," returned that lady with withering irony. "Bah! What folly in a man, especially a young doctor, to want a wife unless he has money, or she has some. Why don't he make money some other way—dealing in horses?"

"Horses? He is not a horse jockey."

"Who said he was?" asked Mrs. Mowry with asperity. "He'll never own a horse—unless some one gives him one. You must learn, Louise—"

"Hush, mother; some one is coming."

"Perhaps it is Mr. Blumenberg," said Mrs. Mowry, eagerly.

"It is Damon," answered Louise, with a sigh of relief, as she bestowed a smile of welcome on a slight, dapper faultlessly dressed young man, who just then approached.

After shaking hands with both ladies, he seated himself on the edge of the piazza near Louise. "Dry weather," he remarked, gazing pensively at the dust which had gathered on his immaculate boots. "Where's Pythias?"

For an answer Louise gave him an appealing look. He, scenting trouble, glanced quickly up at Mrs. Mowry, who glared haughtily into space. An embarrassing silence fell upon the group.

"I thought I should find him here," said Damon, at last.

"You have a right to your opinion," was Mrs. Mowry's terse reply.

Damon thought that he had. That fact being too obvious for discussion, he went on to say with the ease of old friendship: "I had anticipated finding Pythias the accepted suitor of Louise."

"That will never be," declared Mrs. Mowry. "The man who marries my daughter must be able to support her. Her husband will have to be a rich man, not a poor physician. Why does he not perform a big cure?"

"You forget he is not yet an M. D.," expostulated Damon, "although even now he is better fitted to practise than many physicians."

"Mr. Prince ought to liberally reward you for pleading his case so well," said Mrs. Mowry, sarcastically.

"Pythias needs no defence," answered Damon, quietly. "By his industry and sobriety, he has proved himself worthy of any good woman."

"Humph—a lawyer's opinion!"


"Mother, you ought not to speak so harshly to Damon," hurriedly interposed Louise. "He is our true friend."

"As such, he ought not to object to a few plain words from me," sharply replied her mother.

"Far from it," returned Damon, pleasantly. "Say what you please to me, Mrs. Mowry. I like independence in women. We lawyers find it a valuable—"

"Independence in a man, becomes cheek in a woman," interrupted Mrs. Mowry, pettishly.

"Say assurance," corrected Damon, as he lazily gazed about him; "it's a better word." Suddenly he straightened up and looked keenly at her: "Suppose Pythias was able to cure you of your deafness?"



"Suppose?" asked she, smiling skeptically. Then she looked bitterly at her instrument of torture, as she was wont to call her trumpet. "Well, if he could cure me of my deafness, I certainly would let him have Louise."

"Will you allow him to try?"

Louise waited with bated breath for her mother's reply to Damon's question, and when her mother answered, "That's another matter," Louise's face fell.

"Do you think I would allow a medical student," continued Mrs. Mowry, "to practise on me, and perhaps deprive me of what little hearing I have left?"

"How do you know what he can do unless you let him try?" persisted Damon.

"I don't know, and what's more, I don't want to know. Damon, you as well as my lawyer know that I have very little money. Many people think that I am still rich and have bought this estate, whereas I am living here by the kindness of a distant relative. Living in genteel poverty in this place where I am not much better than a servant. Louise is young and pretty—"

Damon nodded in approval of this praise.

"Why should I not want her to make a brilliant match? Pythias is a good man; so was his father before he had to face adversity. Why should I want my daughter to endure hardship, poverty, and perhaps worse? Love? Bah! Louise is taken with his broad shoulders and his handsome face. He's a gloomy thing—"

"No, mother, only at times."

"She is young," continued Mrs. Mowry, completely ignoring her daughter's interruption, "and will soon forget this mad infatuation. He and his had drifted away from us. If it had not been for your father's philanthropy I should never have been bothered with him."

Mrs. Mowry arose. "You, Damon, brought him here to ruin Louise's life, and ruin mine. See that you relieve us of his presence. I have other plans for Louise."

"Very well," answered Damon, rising to let her take

her leave, "but as your financial adviser" he said, bowing low, allow me to say that if your daughter is for sale, I trust you will get a good price for her."

## CHAPTER III

### MR. HOOPER SMITH

BEFORE the angry swish of Mrs. Mowry's skirts had died away behind the house, Damon raised a warning finger to the unhappy Louise whose fragile beauty reminded him at that moment of a lily that had been broken by the storm.

"Madam, my mother," he quoted, half sadly, "I have a touch of your condition."

"Indeed, Damon, I am not like my mother. Do you think I would consider any one's heart a bit of merchandise to be disposed of to the highest bidder?"

"You are like your mother," persisted Damon, "She likes to argue—"

"I assure you I don't," quickly interposed Louise, "but what else can I do when mother will insist upon arguing?"

Damon took a step forward and whispered softly in Louise's ear: "Agree with her."

"What!"

He smiled at her outburst of surprise, and playfully pinched her cheek. "You are losing the pink roses that were wont to linger on thy cheeks, fair maid," he said ignoring her implied inquiry. "And why? Because you are attempting an impossibility—trying to change your mother's mind. Will you ever learn to understand her? She likes to have the last word. Then, by all means, let her have it—at the start."

"What!"

Again Damon lowered his voice. "Stop her argument at the very beginning by saying, 'Perhaps you are right'."

Louise's puzzled look vanished as the full import of this innocent ruse broke in upon her bewilderment. She gave

a gleeful laugh and clapped her hands. "Damon, what are you going to do for Pythias?" she asked, with an imploring little gesture. "Do you think he could cure mother of her deafness?"

"I think so, if she would only give him a chance to try. If you will be patient, I think I can fix it. Can you get me a pistol?"

"A pistol?" almost shrieked Louise, her face blanching with terror, as across her mind flashed a picture of Damon, weapon in hand, demanding her mother's consent to her marriage with Pythias.

"There is no danger," placidly answered Damon, who was quite guiltless of any such blood-thirsty design, and who, if the truth were known, was far less likely to engage in a duel than was the intrepid Mrs. Mowry.

"To-day, after banking hours," he went on to explain, "I received the sum of \$20,000. I should have put it in the safe, but Hooper was not at the office, and I could not open it. He must have changed the combination. Just as I was deliberating what to do, a telegram came for me in the name of a client. He thinks he's dying, and wishes to make his will."

"Poor man! Who is he?"

"He is not poor," said Damon, mischievously. "He's rich. You know him; old Mr. Williamson, of Laurel Lake."

"Oh, yes, he lives about two miles from here. But why not leave the money with us and then you can come back and stay all night."

"I must be in Boston before 9 o'clock tomorrow morning. I must be in Court at that time. By riding a mile or so from Williamson's I can get a late train for Boston. It is a regular country road, and if I should be waylaid, a silent friend who could speak for me in an emergency would be acceptable."

"A pistol! The very sight of one makes my blood run cold. I can't help feeling worried about you. Won't you come back here to-night?"

"Impossible. There is nothing to fear," added Damon, reassuringly.

Louise arose, reluctantly. "We will go and ask mother if she has one."

"If Hooper had done right, he would have saved us all this bother," said Damon, as they disappeared within the house through one of the long French windows which opened on the piazza.

At that moment Mr. Hooper Smith was jauntily making his way up the dusty road, all unconscious of the trouble he had occasioned. Arriving at the Parrott House, he glanced hastily up at the piazza, and seeing no one there or about the grounds, he betook himself to the seat in the arbor. He knew, from past experience, that it would not be long before the entrancing Minerva would burst upon his vision.

"Deuce take this headache!" he muttered. He removed his hat and ran his fingers through his hair, which, despite the shears and copious applications of water, would kink up into tight curls.

"Oh, what a dull feeling in the back of my head," he groaned. "Perhaps it is a forerunner of softening of the brain. No, it must be a backrunner. That champagne supper last night, was the cause of it. No, it was those miserable black cigars. Now, a cigarette never makes me sick."

At these words, Hooper took out a tobacco pouch and some paper, and proceeded, deftly, to roll a cigarette, meanwhile gazing anxiously in the direction of the house.

"I wonder where Minerva is," he said to himself, while he lighted the cigarette. "If only I had money, I would ask the dear creature to grace— Oh, my eye! Who can these two old codgers be? Some country relatives, I suppose. Step lively, Hooper."

Suiting his actions to the words, he nimbly slipped into the arbor and there from his point of vantage, curiously surveyed Uncle Jim, who, valise in one hand, nervously waved the other to a short pink and white, roly-poly woman, who trotted after him, her arms weighted down with bundles.



"Come along, come along, Mrs. Kent," fumed Uncle Jim. "You ain't so spry as you used to be forty years ago."

"No, James, nor you neither," retorted Aunt Jane, as she mutinously sank on a bench. "Forty years ago you would have carried all the bundles and been glad to. Now I have to carry half."

"Well, Jane, you know you always wanted half the money, then why not half the work?" Uncle Jim threw back his head and laughed heartily at his own joke. "You believe in a woman's right to work, don't you?"

"You are the last man in the world, James Kent, to taunt me with not working. Who has worked and saved for you for forty years if I haven't? Where would you be now, if you hadn't had a devoted wife?"

In her endeavor to extract her handkerchief from some hidden recess in her clothes, Aunt Jane dropped her hat box, which rolled to her husband's feet. He carefully set down his bag and laboriously picked up her hat box, saying as he did so:

"Well, well, mother, don't take what I said to heart. I was only joking. No man could appreciate you more than I do."

"Nor show it more seldom," whimpered Aunt Jane from behind her handkerchief.

"Come, come," coaxed Uncle Jim, nervously, apprehensive of a long harangue on the duties of a husband; "we'll be late for the train. It will take us twenty minutes to walk to the station."

"No need of our walking if Louise had seen fit to drive us down."

"She has company."

"Of course, she always has some young man at her heels."

"She can't help that. Everybody loves her, and loveable people are always in demand."

"I don't love her," snapped Aunt Jane, and she proceeded to gather up her bundles rather viciously.

"You are hard on the girl, Jane. I love her, and my last will and testament will prove it."

"I think Minerva is worth two of her and Minerva will be the girl for my money."

At this interesting turn of the conversation, Hooper got close to the side of the arbor, forgetting, in his eagerness to hear every word, the cigarette which he held between his teeth.

"Why, James, something is burning," cried Aunt Jane, jumping up in alarm. "I hope I ain't on fire. Look at me, will you?"

Instead of examining his wife's dress, he turned his gaze towards the arbor and suspiciously sniffed the air. "It smells plaguy like tobacco smoke," he said. "Perhaps some one is in the arbor," he added in a low tone.

Quick as a flash, Aunt Jane, alive with curiosity, stepped to the entrance of the arbor and peeped in.

"Good afternoon, madam. I wonder if we're going to have rain?" asked Hooper, pleasantly, as he stood there quite unabashed.

"Good afternoon," answered she. "Waiting for a chance to see Louise, I'll be bound," thought Aunt Jane, whose match-making propensities were always active. Aloud she said, with a knowing nod, "You'll have to wait, young man."

"Wait for what?" queried Hooper, coming from the arbor with a smile on his face, with hat in hand.

"To get a chance to speak with Miss Mowry."

"What can there be about my appearance that leads this fat lady to guess so readily the object of my visit?" thought Hooper, as he glibly said, "I can wait, madam, time is no object to me."

"Come along, mother," interrupted Uncle Jim, impatiently; "we have no time to lose. It is quarter past three now."

Hooper took out his watch and regarded it attentively. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said, with an air of great candor, "it is half past three."

"Then we can't go until after dark," groaned Aunt Jane sinking limply back on the bench. "All your fault, James Kent, to get talking when I wanted to hurry."

"My watch is right," insisted that gentleman, "and we have plenty of time to catch the train, if you will peg right along."

"Peg right along? I won't. Do you want me to get heart disease? Are you sure, young man, your watch is right?"

"It is a chronometer balance, stem winder, adjusted to heat and cold, and, I am happy to say, hasn't varied a minute since I was born."

Aunt Jane gazed admiringly at the wonderful watch which Hooper modestly held out for her inspection. "Do you hear that, James?" she cried. "Your watch has been in the watchmaker's hands more than it has been in your pocket, for the past five years."

"My watch is right," doggedly persisted her better half.

But his remarks fell on deaf ears, for Mrs. Kent had fished out her glasses from her bag and through them was carefully examining Hooper's watch.

"It was bequeathed to me by my grandfather," confided Hooper, in a melancholy voice. "He was a lovely old gentleman."

This last remark was entirely impromptu, as Hooper had never seen his grandfather, that gentleman having died before he was born.

"No doubt of it, no doubt of it," murmured Aunt Jane. "James, take your bag and we'll go back to the house and wait for the next train."

"Suit yourself, mother," responded her spouse good-naturedly. "I am glad to get a chance to see Louise again."

At the mention of this name, Mrs. Kent looked slyly at Hooper, who, not quite comprehending the meaning of her glance, smiled blandly upon her, for want of something better to do.

"Shall I tell her you are here, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Smith—Hooper Smith. Pray, madam, don't trouble yourself. I am sure my presence here or any where else is a matter of complete indifference to Miss Louise."

"There, Jane, you've put your foot right in it," muttered Uncle Jim.

"I wish to see Miss Minerva Mowry," explained Hooper. Aunt Jane cast a triumphant look at Uncle Jim.

"I was just going up to the house," added Hooper, with unblushing effrontery. "Shall I carry your parcels for you?"

"No, young man, you stay where you are, and I will send Minerva to you. Are you any relation to the Broderick-Smiths? They were all red-headed."

"I suppose they must be relatives of mine," assented Hooper, as he raised one hand unconsciously to his auburn curls.

"Never mind," chuckled Uncle Jim, facetiously nudging Hooper in the ribs, "you may outgrow that," and he pointed to his own bald head.

"I'll go and tell Minerva," said Aunt Jane, and away she bustled, quickly followed by Uncle Jim. "James," she said, turning to that man when they were out of ear shot, "perhaps you will now acknowledge that Louise is not the only person of consequence here. And such a nice man," she added with a backward glance at Hooper, who gallantly threw her a kiss, unseen by Uncle Jim.

"Perhaps he is and perhaps he isn't," shrewdly retorted her husband.

"He is," stubbornly asserted Aunt Jane, whose prejudice was somewhat dulled by the activity of the matrimonial bee which was at that moment buzzing in her bonnet.

"He may be all right, but his watch was wrong."

Hooper resumed his seat in the arbor, and lighted a fresh cigarette. "I fancy I've got on the right side of the old lady, and I like to be on good terms with people who've got money."

He neglected to expel a mouthful of cigarette smoke and

was obliged to indulge in a fit of coughing before he could resume his soliloquy.

"She spoke of making a will in favor of Minerva, and he said he was going to give his money to Louise, so I judge there is not that community of interest which exists in some families. So much the better for Minerva and, incidentally, I trust, in the not too far off future, for yours truly."

He glanced up the pathway and saw something which caused him to throw his half-smoked cigarette into the bushes, and vigorously rub the forefinger of his right hand to remove a tell-tale yellow stain. For the something which was approaching was Miss Minerva Mowry, who had on several occasions informed him that she detested cigarettes and would never marry a man who smoked them.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE GODDESS OF WISDOM

As Minerva appeared from behind the house and expectantly tripped across the lawn, Hooper hid in the other end of the arbor—in a spirit of fun rather than from an excess of modesty; in fact, he possessed but little of this virtue. As some men are born to purple and fine linen and others to sackcloth and ashes, so Hooper Smith seemed to have been born with a preponderance of what is commonly known as “cheek”. This quality, which stood him in place of talent, was the direct result of a superabundance of animal spirits, which did him little harm and afforded his friends much amusement.

“She will think I have gone,” he gleefully whispered, as he softly tiptoed across the arbor and peered through the lattice at the advancing Minerva. “Won’t she be disappointed!”

“Where can that donkey be?” queried Minerva, stopping short outside the arbor, and looking about her.

“Donkey!” exclaimed he, coming from the hiding-place in disgust.

“Oh, you are here?”

“Of course, if I am a donkey I am all ‘ear’,” answered he, sulkily.

“There you go again with your miserable puns,” pouted Minerva, who took a secret delight in tantalizing him. “I positively will cut you dead unless you keep from indulging in cheap jokes.”

“Was it a rich joke to call me a donkey?” asked he.

“It wasn’t a joke,” she replied, with a wicked little laugh. Then, fearing that she had gone too far with her fun, she

coily seated herself in the doorway of the arbor, demurely folded her hands in her lap, gazed up at him and softly asked: "Aren't you glad to see me?"

"Of course I am," assented Hooper, his wrath greatly mollified at sight of the pretty picture before him as she sat there like some spirit of the woods, all mischief and sparkle, the sunlight falling in golden patches upon her hair as it filtered through the leaves of the trees that rustled above her head. "But you kept me waiting long enough for a sight of you," he added, his face darkening again.

"I couldn't help it. I was busy. If Aunt Jane had not sent me here, I could not have come as soon as I did."

"Dear Aunt Jane!" he fervently ejaculated—at thought of that lady's money. "I hope, Minerva," he added, severely, "that you will always love your aunt."

"Of course I will," answered she, with thoughts of her aunt's unfailing kindness. "Why are you so fond of her—and in such a short time?" she innocently inquired.

"Because she is so stylish," was Hooper's solemn reply.

"How absurd!"

Minerva laughed in spite of herself at the remembrance of her aunt's ten-year-old bonnet with the red and yellow parrot perched aggressively on top of it. "You are a bad boy, but I am pleased to see you just the same."

"And I am pleased that you are pleased," said he gayly, his wrath totally vanishing under the influence of her merry smile.

"I am pleased that you are pleased that I am pleased," hummed Minerva.

Then he sat down beside her, took her hand in his, and they both laughed like the two children that they were.

"Say, you have got yourself into trouble," cried she, suddenly remembering an important piece of information.

"I am never out of it," he responded, cheerfully.

☐ "Mr. Adams could not open the safe because you changed the combination, so I heard him tell Aunt Mowry, and he has a lot of money he don't want to carry around with him."

"He could've opened the safe if he'd tried," said Hooper, elevating his eyebrows in surprise.

"He said he did try for ten minutes."

"He needn't have tried but one minute. Minute is the word that will unlock her," he explained in triumph, "and I told him so. It reminded me of you," he said, smiling upon her sentimentally.

"Reminds you of me?" she asked in surprise.

"Why don't you see, Minnie, when I spell the word M-i-n-n-i-e-t, I can't help thinking of you."

"M-i-n-n-i-e-t," she repeated, as she threw back her head and laughed heartily. "You don't suppose Mr. Adams spelled 'Minute' in that ridiculous way, do you?"

"Why I never thought of that," said Hooper, blankly, after a pause.

"My dear boy," she entreated, laying a warning hand on his shoulder, don't you ever spell for a prize—that is, if you don't want to miss it."

"I was spelling for a prize when I spelled M-i-n-n-i-e-t," was his rueful answer. "I hope I won't lose it," he added, vainly trying to solve her answer from her downcast eyes.

"You must wait until I give you the word," she said at last.

"Let it be yes," he whispered, eagerly. "I love you. I have loved you since the first time I came here, when I saw you running down the path to meet Mr. Adams, with your eyes all a sparkle and the sunlight dancing upon your curls in the very way it does to-day. Oh, Minnie, say yes," he pleaded. "It is such an easy word."

"But such an important one," she hurriedly protested, at last perceiving that her admirer had developed into her lover.

"You have been to me an angel—a peri, a goddess." In his ardor he knelt before her and clasped her hands to his heart. "Here I shall remain in the dust at your feet until you say—"

"Excuse me."



"Certainly," promptly answered Hooper, from force of habit, as he quickly turned and beheld Damon Adams, who had inadvertently stumbled upon this little scene.

"I am anxious to speak to you, Hooper," explained Damon. "Pardon my intrusion."

"No intrusion, no intrusion," the young man answered, rising to his feet with ready self-possession. "Minerva lost her ring. Oh, there it is," he cried with a sudden lunge at an imaginary object in the grass, at the same time dexterously slipping a ring from his little finger.

"How fortunate!" he explained in a tone of great feeling, as he placed it upon Minerva's third finger, with an admonitory squeeze of her hand. "You must be more careful in the future, little girl," with a warning shake of his finger.

Damon stood and gazed at this farce with genuine astonishment. Shortly after Hooper had come to work for him, he had made up his mind not to be surprised at any effrontery that his volatile clerk might be guilty of. But this last exhibition of brazen impudence—expecting Damon to believe that the ring which he had seen on Hooper's finger for the last two years, really belonged to Minerva—almost upset his habitual outward calm. However, with his usual politeness, he bowed in assent, drew his clerk aside and said:

"Here is a package of money which I wish you to take to the office and put in the safe, sure, to-night. Will you do it?"

"Certainly, sir. I was too sick to come to work this morning. I am sorry about the safe."

"No explanations needed," said Damon, kindly. "Only, don't forget to get this money to the office. And leave the safe combination written out in the stamp drawer so that I can get in to-morrow morning—in case you should not recover," he added with a smile. "I am in great haste, so good-bye."

In the meantime Minerva, with flushed cheeks, stood gazing longingly at the ring, which, as she waved her hand

back and forth in the sun, gleamed like a dew-drop on her finger. She had always admired this ring. Its brilliancy had been her delight and envy since the first time it had flashed, like some unattainable star, before her vision. Involuntarily she pressed the ring to her lips.

Turning from Damon who had just hurried away, Hooper surprised her in the act.

"Take it," she said, visibly embarrassed at being thus caught in what she considered such a silly position. With an assumed air of indifference she proceeded to return the ring to its rightful owner.

"Keep it," urged Hooper.

"Keep it?" she repeated, mechanically, slipping the ring back on her finger.

"It is yours—upon one condition." Before she could utter a word, he caught her hand, ring and all, in his strong grasp. "Say yes, Minnie, say yes," he said, looking down into the depths of her clear eyes.

Over her face came a half-frightened look; then she gazed back into his eyes, and after a moment's hesitation she whispered, scarce above her breath, "Yes. But," she added, with a quick change of tone, "no one must know for a while. I wish first to earn my own living. As you know, I am a dependent here. Since the death of my parents I have lived with Aunt Mowry. She is good to me in her way, but after all she is only my aunt by marriage. I will keep the ring—" She looked down at the pledge on her finger and a tear sparkled in her eye. "But I wish to be independent before I am your wife."

He bent longingly over her to seal the engagement with a kiss.

"Don't!" she whispered, starting back with the swiftness of a startled fawn. "Here comes Mr. Blumenberg."

"Confound that foreigner!" ejaculated the disappointed Hooper.

"I don't like him," admitted his companion, hastily drawing Hooper behind the arbor, as she gazed earnestly

at the man in question as he slowly sauntered up the walk.  
"He is too dark and heavy."

Heavy he was in gait, looks and weight, and his dark eyes, hair, and mustache accentuated the pallor of his face.

"He looks like a thing playing gentleman," whispered Hooper, upon whom his pallid countenance, together with the marked curve of his heavy brows, produced a disagreeable feeling.

To a student of human nature this man with his heavy gait and furtive glances would prove an object of suspicion. He certainly was an unpleasant sight to the two people who stood watching him, for as he drew near, they suddenly beat a hasty retreat, as if fleeing from the approach of evil.

As they walked swiftly towards the back gate, Hooper remarked: "I don't see what Louise can see in that fellow to like."

"She doesn't; she hates him. It's her mother."

"I'm glad you haven't got a mother," said Hooper.

"That's a very kind wish of yours," retorted Minerva.  
"Have you got one?"

"I've had two. A mother and a step-mother—but we never speak as we pass by. You know what I meant, Minnie. Perhaps your mother, if you had one, would not think me good enough for you."

"In which opinion I would agree with her," said Minerva.

It took Hooper some little time to grasp the full force of this remark. When he did, he answered, humbly:

"Well, I suppose that is true. I think I am a fortunate fellow to win you and, for your sake, I wish I were a better bargain."

"That's the most sensible remark you ever made in your life, Hooper Smith. If you'll always remember that after we are married—"

Mr. Smith caught her in his arms and gave her a hasty embrace. He attempted to kiss her again, but his cheek tingled for half an hour afterwards.

"I'll never forget it," he said.

"What you said?" asked Minerva.

"No, what I did, and what I tried to do—and didn't."

He looked at his watch. "Phew! I have only five minutes to catch the train. I must be off."

When he reached the road he called back: "Coming into the city to-morrow, Minnie?"

"I may," she replied, "but I shall not have time to go through every street."

"Well, don't forget Court Street, and he laid a strong emphasis on the name of the thoroughfare.

Minnie gave her head a toss and turned away. Like Lot's wife, she looked backward, and there stood Mr. Smith throwing kisses from the tips of his fingers.

"What a silly goose!" exclaimed Minerva, as she made her way towards the house. "I have read somewhere that it is such men that make the most attentive husbands. That's what I want—somebody to wait on me. I have waited on others long enough."

## CHAPTER V

### A FAVORED SUITOR

THE arbor, cool and shady and but a short distance from the walk, was an alluring retreat to all frequenters of the Parrott house. To Conrad Blumenberg, who was tired from his walk along the dusty road, it proved a veritable Mecca. With an exclamation of relief he seated himself on the bench just within the arbor, placed his bag beside him on the floor, and, with a satisfied smile on his countenance, gazed at the Parrott house, the white and yellow surface of which shone in the afternoon sun through the branches of the intervening trees. He smiled again at this picture of peace and plenty, but the smile was not a pleasant one.

"I wonder where the fair heiress is?" he said, somewhat arrogantly, already, in fancy, master of the noble estate.

At this moment his glance fell upon a hat which lay half under the seat. "Why she must have just left here," he exclaimed regretfully, for in his eyes Louise was almost as good to look upon as were her possessions.

"No," he immediately added, recognizing in the pert looking hat something inconsistent with Louise's characteristic simplicity of apparel, "that hat belongs to that incarnation of mischief—the poor relation, Minerva. That girl detests me, and what is worse, she takes no pains to conceal her feelings. Well, when I am once married to Louise, her scornful cousin and her deaf mother shall bow to my will or I'll know the reason why."

He took out a cigar, lighted it, and puffed lazily as he continued his soliloquy.

"I am afraid the old lady won't hear the trumpet of Death when it calls her. One comfort, she will be the last

to hear the Angel Gabriel. I ought to be glad that she is so easily managed. Strange," he mused, looking at the smoke as it rose feather-like from his cigar and melted away into thin air, "how readily those awfully clever women can be hoodwinked in certain matters. Well, I must play rich a little longer, although keeping up the bluff has been a tough game."

He fell into a reverie, which, to judge from the expression of his face, was far from pleasant. After a while he impatiently threw away his half-smoked cigar and took from his pocket a letter at which he gazed apprehensively, as he gingerly held it before him in his long taper fingers.

"What a cursed coward I am," he at last ejaculated, "that I don't dare to learn whether my plan has succeeded or not. Two hours in my possession and it is still unread. I wish I had a glass of brandy," he muttered, passing his handkerchief over his face which had grown clammy under the stress of his emotion. "I will read it."

Lest his determination should desert him, he took out a pearl handled penknife and methodically cut one edge of the envelope. This he placed beside him on the bench, after slowly removing its contents. Unfolding the letter and smoothing out its creases on his knee, he read:

"New Orleans, June 10, 1885.

Dear Sir:—

Your favor of the 2nd at hand. We are very much pleased to learn that you have discovered Mr. Prince's son, Pythias. As you well know, judgment was given against the Government in a long contested case of Prince vs. United States, but you do not know that the full amount claimed, \$20,000, was allowed, Mr. Prince having been a strong Union man. This sum we send to you—"

Mr. Blumenberg threw back his head in convulsive glee. "I am in luck. My plan has worked!" he exclaimed; then continued to read, "through our corresponding attorney, Mr. Damon Adams, Court Street, Boston."

"Perdition!" he growled. "The game has slipped me when almost in my grasp."

"You can introduce Mr. Prince to him," the letter went on to say, "and secure the payment and, we trust, a good commission.

Yours truly,

Hawkins Bros., Counsellors."

"Lost! What consummate fools. How can I produce a Mr. Prince who exists only in my imagination?"

Mr. Blumenberg rose to his feet and walked to and fro within the narrow limits of the arbor, like some restless beast enraged from long captivity.

"Louise! Louise!!"

At the sound of Mrs. Mowry's voice just outside the arbor, Conrad quickly slipped the letter into his pocket, and at the same time assumed an air of pleased surprise as he went to the entrance to greet his prospective mother-in-law.

"Louise! Where are you? Uncle James and Aunt Jane want you. Why, how do you do, Mr Blumenberg!"

His hostess poured forth an avalanche of welcome, the everlasting trumpet in one hand, the other held out in greeting. "Have you been here long? Why didn't you go right up to the house? Have you seen my daughter?"

"I am sorry to say I have not," replied Conrad, in answer to the last of her volley of questions. "But I will take a turn in the garden and find her for you."

"Pray don't let me trouble you. I will find her."

"No, no, sit here in the shade of this tree while I search for her. "It is no trouble," he asserted suavely, with a low bow. "It is a blessed relief," he added savagely, as he moved out of earshot of the smiling lady—only to be confronted by Minerva, who overheard his uncomplimentary remark and, worse still, made no attempt to conceal the fact.

Under her wicked smile his violent temper leaped to life. He quickly controlled it, however, and the red flush that mounted to his brow faded away, making his face seem almost ghastly by contrast. He bowed coldly and passed on without a word.

"Oh, how I would like to have Hooper punch that man," exclaimed Minerva, as she frowned at the broad back of the retreating man. "Dear Hooper, I hope he will get that money home safely. Mrs. Hooper Smith, Mrs. Hooper Smith," she whispered furtively, drawing from inside her waist the diamond ring which hung on a cord around her neck.

"Minerva!" called Mrs. Mowry, suddenly, turning around and catching sight of her niece, "have you seen Louise?"

Minerva, with a deft movement, concealed her ring and pointed towards the orchard, delighted at the thought that Mr. Blumenberg had gone in the opposite direction.

"What are you standing there for?" demanded her aunt, with an impatient tap of the trumpet against the arm of her seat. "Why don't you go up to the house and finish your work and not moon here all day?"

"I came for my hat," exclaimed the young lady. "There it is."

As she dove for her hat, her eyes came on a level with the seat where lay Conrad's envelope. "What's this?" she queried, and clutching her hat with one hand she grabbed the envelope with the other as she read:

Return in 5 days to  
HAWKINS BROS.  
New Orleans, La.  
General Delivery. To be called for.

MR. CHARLES BURTON,  
BOSTON, MASS.

"I wonder if there is a letter in it. No, empty, Not so much in it as in one of Hooper's jokes—and they are awfully thin."

"What have you got there?" questioned Mrs. Mowry, whose eagle eyes took in everything. "A letter?"

"No, ma'am, only an empty envelope that somebody threw away. "Who is Mr. Charles Burton?" she pondered, with her back to her aunt. "Hooper must have dropped this when he was proposing. No doubt he had too much on his mind to care for what was in his pocket. I wonder what he is up to? I will plague him a lot before I give it to him," and she laughed as she hurried off.



"My search has been in vain," said Conrad, returning a few minutes later, "the princess cannot be found and the prince is disconsolate," he added jocularly.

"Prince!" thought the alarmed Mrs. Mowry, who had but imperfectly caught his remark. "I hope he doesn't know about Pythias. What did you say?" she asked aloud.

"No use talking fairy talk to this dame," he snarled aside. "I'd better save it for the daughter. I remarked that perhaps she is engaged at the house," he politely explained in a louder tone.

"No," contradicted his companion, "she is at liberty now. A friend of hers, a lawyer named Adams, has been here to see her, but he has gone."

"Adams? Adams did you say?" he repeated, eagerly.

"Yes, Damon Adams, a lawyer. Does business on Court Street in Boston."

"The same man!" exclaimed Conrad under his breath. "The fates are against me." Then his face darkened at the thought of a still worse turn of luck. Narrowly eyeing Mrs. Mowry, he seated himself near her and softly asked:

"Is he a suitor for your daughter?"

"Not a bit of it," she said bluntly. "He has known Louise ever since she was a baby, when he, an overgrown boy, used to carry her around in his arms. His father and my husband were great friends."

At the mention of her husband's name she sighed and thoughtfully smoothed out a wrinkle in her dress, which hung in stiff folds about her commanding figure.

"Damon is a widower," she presently went on to say. "He does not dream of marrying again—although he is quite a lady's man," she explained with a sage shake of her head. "Would you believe it," she asked, with sudden change of countenance, "he wanted to borrow a pistol of me? The very idea of it!"

"A pistol!" cried Conrad, in surprise. "What for?"

"Well,"—she lowered her voice and looked about her cautiously—"he has a great deal of money with him and is

afraid of robbers. He don't know who the money belongs to, so he is all the more careful about it."

"Robbers?" asked Conrad, somewhat taking aback.

"Robbers here?" he protested, gazing about him at the idyllic scene.

"He has gone to Job Williamson's to make his will," explained Mrs. Mowry, whose confidence in this rich foreigner was unlimited, "and he will ride from that house to Roseville station to take the midnight train."

"Of course you drew on your ancestral armory and loaned him gun and pistol, sword and dagger?" asked her listener, with a curious glitter in his eyes.

Mrs. Mowry laughed lightly at this allusion to her ascetors. She would not tell him of her false position and narrow income. Why should she? He had plenty of money and a long pedigree—he had told her so repeatedly—and when he was once in possession of her beautiful daughter, he would readily forgive her lack of worldly goods, so Mrs. Mowry argued, as she merely said in answer to his question:

"No I never had a pistol in the house, and what is more, I don't intend to have one."

Then, fearing he might continue the dangerous subject of "family," she rose, saying apologetically: "I must go up to the house and see the folks, and will send Louise to you at once."

Left alone, Conrad stood with a triumphant look on his face. "So I have found my man," he exclaimed, feverishly. "He will answer my purpose better than young Prince. I hope I shall never find him," he muttered, as he paced to and fro. "Adams is unarmed—I can waylay him. But"—he paused in his rapid walk—"there are two things to do yet. I don't know Adams by sight. That can be easily fixed though; Mrs. Mowry can make that all right. But he must not know me. I have it," he said, entering the arbor, "the false beard in my bag. Where are those gold spectacles? I am sure I saw a pair here somewhere.

There they are on the table, and this big felt hat; I might as well take that too. They will be of more use to me than to the owner."


After he had placed the purloined articles in his bag he took from one of its recesses—a pistol. "My trusty friend looks rusty," he whispered, eyeing the weapon critically. "I will reload it. I will step behind the arbor and discharge it. I can easily give an excuse to the old lady if she should happen to hear the report."

With the pistol half hidden up his sleeve, he walked out of the arbor, in his excitement not perceiving Louise who was hurrying across the lawn, her gaze fastened on the ground as though searching for something.

"Aunt Jane's glasses must be lost, she was murmuring to herself, as she moved toward the arbor. "I can't find them anywhere. And surely Uncle Jim's hat is on the table."

The next instant the report of a pistol rang out on the quiet air. Louise's heart gave a terrified leap. "Damon—shot!" was the thought that went through her mind like a lightning flash. With one foot on the arbor step, she stood pale and still as though the bullet had entered her body and deprived it of life. In another moment she caught sight of Mr. Blumenberg coming from behind the arbor, in his hand a pistol, from which curled a tiny wreath of smoke. Instantly, she swayed, tottered, and fell senseless to the ground. The trying events of the day, together with this fancied horror, had proved too much for her worn out nerves. In merciful unconsciousness she lay prone upon the grass.

Conrad quickly threw his pistol into the bag, then lifted Louise's frail form in his strong arms and carried her to a nearby seat. The sight of her handsome face as she lay pale and helpless in one corner of the seat, overcame, for the time being, this man's selfish, brutal instincts. He knelt beside her, and clasping her cold hands in his, endeavored to warm them into life.



"Thank Heaven you are better," he uttered, in relief, as at length her eyelids fluttered. "No one was hurt," he whispered, reassuringly. "I was fixing my pistol."

Suddenly came the sound of hurried footsteps, coupled with the exclamation:

"What is the matter? I thought I heard a pistol."

"Confound that woman," growled Conrad, between his teeth, without looking behind him at Mrs. Mowry, who had just rustled across the lawn in great consternation.

At the welcome sound of her mother's voice, Louise strove to rise but she was too weak for the effort and her head fell forward upon Conrad's shoulder.

This pretty tableau caused Mrs. Mowry to pause and clasp her hands in thanksgiving. Here was proof positive that Mr. Blumenberg had won her daughter's consent. Forgetting the pistol shot that had so startled her, she discreetly turned away and hurried back to the house.

"Mother!" called Louise, faintly.

"Don't exert yourself to speak," said Conrad, tenderly raising her hands to his lips.

As she felt his kisses rained upon her hands she struggled to her feet, a flood of color suffusing her pale face. "Let me go!" she cried, vainly striving to hide her repugnance.

As she turned to flee from him, she caught sight of a figure moving towards them from behind the bushes. With a start Louise recognized her visitor of the morning, and gave a sigh of relief. Strangely enough she trusted this bedraggled woman more than she did the well dressed man at her side. Somewhat quieted by the presence of the unknown trespasser, Louise suffered Conrad, who had eyes only for her, to lead her towards the house.

The woman standing within the shade of the bushes, peered after them. "I wish I could catch a glimpse of his face," she whispered in tones of weary discouragement. "I feel sure it is he. I wonder," she half sobbed, "if he knows where she is. If I cannot soon find her"—and the woman raised her face towards the sky and convulsively threw up her hands—"may the vengeance of Heaven fall upon him."

## CHAPTER VI

### ON THE HILL TOP

WHEN Louise and Conrad reached the house, they found Mrs. Mowry presiding over a dainty tea-table that had been placed at one end of the piazza. It required very little urging on the part of Mrs. Mowry to induce Conrad to seat himself at the table—particularly after he had seen Louise sink listlessly into a chair by her mother's side.

"My family are all indoors. They scorn afternoon tea—think it is a fad of mine," explained his hostess, as she poured from a blue-figured teapot a cup of the fragrant amber liquid. "Fad indeed," she protested, dropping two lumps of sugar in the cup with a slice of lemon on the side before handing the steaming beverage to Conrad. "Why, in England, tea drinking, I understand, has become a part of the constitution."

"If it hasn't it ought to—that is, if the English brew tea like this," gallantly answered Conrad.

"In Germany they drink a great deal of coffee, I believe," went on Mrs. Mowry, as she proceeded to pour a cup of tea for Louise who, up to that time, had been busy helping Mr. Blumenberg to some thin slices of bread and butter and some small sandwiches.

"I used to think," discoursed Mrs. Mowry, "that only Arabs drank coffee continually—but we live and learn. You don't mind my comparing Germans with Arabs, do you, Mr. Blumenberg?" asked the lady archly.

"Not unless they are street Arabs," replied that gentleman with a smile.

"That remark certainly entitles you to another cup of tea," she said, extending her hand for his empty cup.

"You seem to forget that Russians are great tea drinkers," ventured Conrad, as he helped himself, from a crystal bowl, to some cracked ice, which he put in his tea. "Speaking of Russians," he said, "reminds me of the woman who once told me, in a burst of confidence, that her husband was a Russian—but good."

"How absurd!"

While Mrs. Mowry, glowing with satisfaction, and Conrad, joyful with secret exultation, laughed and chatted, Louise sat pale and silent with food untouched. On the way to the house she begged Mr. Blumenberg to say nothing about her fainting spell. Despairingly she sat between those two jesting people, who held her happiness within their grasp, when suddenly the determination came to her—as a last desperate hope—to throw herself upon the mercy of the man; to acquaint him with her love for Pythias, and beg him to release her from any promise her mother might have made.

With this end in view, after tea when her mother suggested that she should show Conrad the sunset from the hill nearby, Louise brightened up and gladly acquiesced.

"Want me to go with you?" asked Minerva, who had just entered through one of the windows opening on the piazza.

Louise shook her head in dissent, much to the surprise of Minerva, whose offer was actuated more by pity, rather than from any desire to view the departing sun.

"Suit yourself," she answered, with ill-concealed disgust, while she furtively purloined a slice of lemon from the table and skilfully rubbed it over her hand in the hope that this treatment would bleach it to a whiteness worthy of the brightness of her cherished ring.

Louise remaining firm in her refusal, Minerva began to pack the dishes neatly on a tray, preparatory to carrying them to the kitchen.

"I know you will enjoy the view so much," said Mrs. Mowry softly to Conrad with a beaming smile, as she virtually elbowed him and Louise off the piazza.

Minerva stopped her work and watched Louise in a puzzled way until she disappeared through the back gate.

"They will have a grand opportunity to commune with nature," commented Louise's mother.

"If she wishes to commune with nature, or with anything else, in the company of that muff, she is welcome to do so," was Minerva's emphatic thought.

Louise was only too happy at this opportunity to be alone with Mr. Blumenberg. He gave her no chance, however, to talk of herself. As they slowly wended their way up the steep hill, by some strange chance, as it seemed to her, Damon became the subject of their conversation.

"A friend?" she repeated, in answer to Conrad's question. "He is more like a brother. Oh, I cannot remember," she exclaimed, forgetting her own trouble for the time being, in her enthusiasm for Damon, "when I was without his tender care and thoughtfulness. One would have to know him to appreciate him. He is so good, so noble—"

"What does he look like?" interrupted her companion, a touch of impatience in his voice.

"How like me!" laughed she. "Describing his mental qualities before I do his physical appearance. Let me see," she said, slowly, "he is dark and slender, of medium height and build. He is quiet, but," she added, eagerly, "people are apt to obey him, and"—with a proud toss of her head—"they are afraid of him, too, upon the rare occasions that he shows his temper."

By this time they had reached the top of the hill and Louise forgot Damon, Conrad, everything in her delight at the scene which stretched before her. In the distance, on the other side of the green hollow that lay below, rose a chain of hills, the sides and summits of which were clothed with trees that shone like burnished gold, under the rays of the sun slowly sinking from sight in the west, behind a mass of roseate clouds. At this glorious sight of nature, robed in such royal splendor, Louise clasped her hands in an ecstasy, and involuntarily burst forth:

“ ‘God’s in his heaven—  
All’s right with the world.’ ”

Meanwhile, Conrad, who cared little for scenery and much less for poetic effusions from Browning, had seated himself on a big rock and began ruefully to rub his ankle which he had slightly turned on coming up the hill.

“Your mother spoke of Mr. Adams’ going to Roseville. Is it far from here?” he said at length.

“It is about three miles—over there,” she answered, pointing to the east where a few houses shone white among the foliage. “Damon could come back this way, but he will probably take the short cut through the woods to the Roseville station,” she explained, as she waved her hand towards a thick growth of trees, that were beginning to look dark at the approach of night. “The short cut through those woods is like the short side of an isosceles triangle,” she explained, recalling her Euclid.

Conrad gave one brief look at the woods, continued to rub his ankle and said nothing.

“Does your ankle hurt you? How selfish of me! We must go back at once.” Louise was filled with solicitude in a moment.

As they walked down the hill, Conrad tripped over a stone, slipped, and almost fell.

“I have given it a good wrench this time,” he said, with a stifled groan, setting his teeth hard to keep back a cry of pain.

“Can’t you lean on me?” cried Louise in distress. “If we can only reach the house, mother will give you something to relieve the pain.”

“No, thank you. There, I can walk,” he said, setting his injured foot firmly on the ground. “I will manage to hobble to the station—it is not much farther than your house—and try to get back to Boston where I can be treated by a physician. Don’t bother about me,” he protested, ignoring her movement to accompany him. “Kindly make my excuses to your mother.” He lifted his hat and, before she realized it, was part way down the road.



She gazed after him as he limped away. For a moment she stood undecided whether to follow him or not, then feeling that her services were not needed, and being in no mood to relate to her inquisitive mamma the trying incidents of day, Louise retraced her steps. When almost at the top of the hill, she sat down upon a low, crumbling stone wall and gazed pensively across the fields through a break in the trees.

Everything had gone wrong with her to-day. Even her little ruse to see Mr. Blumenberg alone, had fallen through, and she blamed herself as the cause of his misfortune. She wondered in sadness if she would ever be wholly free from this disagreeable entanglement. Her faith told her that matters would right themselves—but when? When? she asked herself despairingly.

Presently the quiet of the woods soothed her troubled spirit. Mr. Blumenberg was not an unkind man. When he knew she loved Pythias—and she would tell him at the next opportunity—he would go away and torment her no more, and she and Pythias would then be happy. Yes, everything would come out all right. The tree under which Louise sat and argued thus began to sway in the fresh evening breeze, and in the gathering dusk it seemed to her to be some gentle spirit lifting its arms above her in benediction.

Louise had been a great lover of nature from earliest childhood, but she soon learned to keep her childish enthusiasm from her schoolmates, most of whom simply regarded the fields as huge play-grounds and looked upon the trees as mere out door accessories of a gymnasium. As she grew older she contracted the habit of wandering alone through the woods and over the hills and amidst their solitude forgot the pettiness of civilized existence. Best of all she loved the sky. She would sit for hours gazing up into the blue unfathomable depths, or watching the play of the white clouds across its azure surface. At night, when the stars, one by one, lighted up the great vault until the whole

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heavens seemed dotted with golden lilies, the peace of God would fill her heart, driving away dull care and whispering to her of faith, and hope, and love, that, in this world are to be found by all who have trust and await their coming.

On this particular evening she watched the sky, where low down on the horizon gleamed a pale yellow band of light, that gradually changed to a vivid green, before it merged into the deep blue of the higher heaven. The east, by contrast with this color, looked almost black, and Louise, turning suddenly towards that quarter, beheld a tiny point of light that was shining brightly in the darkness.

"My star!" she joyfully exclaimed, then repeated:

"Wish I may, wish I might,

Have my wish before to-morrow night."

"I wish—Oh, that Pythias is happy," she whispered, gazing wistfully at the star that he and she together had so often watched in happier hours.

The words had scarcely passed her lips when the form of a man stood out upon the brow of the hill, between her and the star. His back was turned, and he, too, was gazing at the star. By his quick, nervous gesture—the way he pushed the hat off his brow—Louise recognized him!

"Pythias!" she called softly.

He turned and saw her, a quiet little figure on the stone wall. "I knew I would find you somewhere here," he exclaimed with glad conviction.

Seating himself beside her, and fondly patting her cheek he said: "Dear little one! Star gazing as usual?"

"Yes, and so were you. I saw you," she answered gleefully. "Now, don't deny it; you act as shamefacedly as if you had been caught robbing a bank."

"Well, you see, I just came from the station, and my foot-steps naturally led me this way."

"Did you meet anybody on the road?" inquired Louise anxiously.

"Yes, a thick-set man."

"That was Mr. Blumenberg. He was trying to catch the

train for Boston. The poor man! He sprained his ankle when coming up this hill."

"Sprained his ankle!" repeated Pythias in surprise. "He was walking as fast as I."

"Why, you must be mistaken," she protested, in some bewilderment.

"No, I am not mistaken," replied he, firmly. "Come to think of it, he looked at me narrowly, and what is more, he did not keep on to the station, but turned up Stover's road."

"What!" Louise's eyebrows were elevated in astonishment. "Why that road would take him to Roseville. I can't understand the meaning of his conduct."

"I can. I'll bet you that man is no good. He is up to some mischief, the scoundrel!" In his vehemence Pythias rose to his feet.

"Don't dear," pleaded Louise, who feared an exhibition of his quick temper.

"How can I help it?"

At these words uttered so fiercely, Louise hurriedly arose and appealingly held out her hands which, all unconscious of the pain that he caused, he pressed together in his strong grasp, as he asked:

"Can I tamely stand by and see another usurp my place?"

"That he can never do," was her firm response.

"Did he not just leave you here, on this spot where we have spent so many happy hours?"

"Be calm, I beg of you, Pythias," she cried, vainly striving to release her imprisoned hands. Tears trembled in her eyes, occasioned by his harsh words. "My mother insisted that he should come here with me. Have you lost faith in me?"

"No, no, no, but I am jealous of every moment you spend with that man. I begrudge this stranger your thoughts, your words—"

He dropped her hands and walked excitedly back and forth, while Louise who knew him well, watched intently, knowing that his jealous feelings would soon pass away.

"Oh, why can't I take you from them," he began again—"far, far away? But no! I love you too much to ask you to share my privations."

A stifled sob from Louise changed the current of his thoughts. He drew her to him and kissed her. "Hush, dear, don't weep. I will be calm. I know your mother means well; she loves you—thinks it right to bestow you upon this man. Who is he? What is he? Nobody seems to know, yet in some mysterious way during Damon's and my absence in New York, he has worked himself into her good graces. The schemer, I could throttle him!"

Louise, trembling at his violent outburst, and vainly trying to quiet the turbulent tide of words, suddenly gave a cry of terror. Behind a clump of bushes on the other side of the stone wall, she saw a moving shadow. Almost in a frenzy at the thought of a possible encounter between Mr. Blumenberg and Pythias, she took her irate lover by the hand and to his astonishment, hurried down the hill, drawing him after her.

"Oh, I am so nervous," she gasped, as she paused for breath when they reached the foot of the hill.

"Running away from your own shadow?" asked Pythias, with a laugh hearty enough to dissipate all traces of his recent anger.

"Yes, yes," quickly answered Louise in her relief at getting him away from the spot. "Oh, here is Minerva!"

"Here is what's left of her," retorted that young lady, advancing towards them. "I have been looking for you for the last half hour," she said with asperity. "Where is Mr. Blumenberg?" she queried in surprise, as she noticed for the first time Louise's escort. "I saw him near the arbor over an hour ago, when he came back for his bag. I supposed he had joined you again."

"He left me some time ago," answered Louise, with a gentle pressure of Pythias' hand, to caution him to let the subject drop. She held his hand for a minute, reluctant to let him go. "Good-night," she whispered, at last. "Minerva and I will keep each other company for the rest of the way."

After Pythias and Louise had hurried from the hill a woman stole from behind the bushes and peered after them.

"It was not he," she muttered, blankly. "I am sure I saw him come up this hill, and with her. I have lost track of him once more. But I will never rest until I find the wretch. I will dog his footsteps until he tells me where my child is."

She seated herself upon the wall where Louise, the embodiment of hope, had mused earlier in the evening, and rocked back and forth, the picture of grim despair, her clothes hanging limply about her gaunt figure and her unloosened hair flying in the wind.

"Would that I could clasp her in my arms to-night," she sobbed in an agony of grief. "To-night, to-night," she moaned, until the very trees seemed to take up the cry and moaned in unison, "to-night, to-night."

## CHAPTER VII

### A QUESTION OF IDENTITY

EARLY the next morning Damon, after unlocking the door with a click, hurriedly entered his office in Boston and looked sharply about him.

"That was a close shave," he ejaculated, as he flung a package on his desk and sank into a nearby seat. The next instant he sprang to his feet with the startled exclamation, "Hooper!"

That young man, coatless and vestless, with rumpled hair and hanging suspenders, stood blinking in the doorway of the private office, from where he had stumbled upon hearing Damon's footsteps.

"What are you doing here at this hour?" asked Damon, gazing in astonishment at this unexpected apparition.

"Confound it, that's the very question I should like to ask you!" thought that young man, as with one hand he tried to pull up his suspenders and with the other to pat his curly hair into some semblance of order.

Damon at once eagerly followed up his first question with another: "Have you got the money?"

While dressing in the private office, Hooper had been dreamily planning out the furnishings of his future home with Minnie, and naturally thinking that Damon's inquiry referred to this all engrossing subject, he promptly answered, "No."

"What!" almost yelled Damon.

"Oh, you mean your money," replied his clerk, now thoroughly awakened by Damon's consternation. "That's in the cash box."

Damon resumed his seat with a gesture of relief. Then

suddenly springing up again, he nervously exclaimed, "What's the combination? Minute?"

"I can open it, sir," said Hooper, stepping briskly towards the safe in the corner.

"No matter, I won't trouble you," said Damon.

The young man began industriously to assort the mail which had just been pushed through an aperture in the door, and at the same time he inwardly hurled anathemas at all inconsiderate employers who disturbed the routine of offices by appearing there at unseemingly early hours, when Damon called out impatiently from before the safe.

"What's the matter here? It won't work. How did you get in?"

"The fact is, Mr. Adams," explained Hooper, going in some confusion towards the safe, "I made an error in the combination. I didn't think it best to change it by gas-light when I brought the money here last night, so I slept here on the couch in the private office, so as to fix the combination this morning. Your coming so early—"

"All right, open it yourself," said Damon, good-naturedly, turning away. "By the way," he remarked from the desk as he abstractly looked over the mail, "change that combination to—Louise. I can remember that."

"Humph!"

"What did you say?" queried Damon, who did not quite catch the drift of the muffled remark which came from the direction of the safe.

"I said here it is," unblushingly answered Hooper, as he handed the cash-box to Damon, who, after eagerly examining the contents set it on the desk with an exclamation of satisfaction.

"The fact is," he began, turning apologetically to Hooper, "I was up all night."

"You don't mean it," answered the somewhat astonished clerk. "By Jove, you look as though you had been," he inwardly commented, taking note of the dark circles beneath Damon's eyes, which, in the excitement of his employer's

early appearance at the office had entirely escaped Hooper's usually astute gaze.

"And consequently I don't feel like myself this morning."

"Yes, yes," breathed his listener sympathetically, while visions of a bacchanalian feast with Mr. Damon Adams as the leading spirit flashed across his fertile imagination. "Strange, how these quiet men will break out occasionally," thought Hooper with a wise shake of his head.

"You can see that I am a little nervous."

"I know how it is myself," quickly interposed the other, as with his hands encompassing his forehead, he tipped Damon a knowing wink.

Always having found brandy and soda to be the most efficacious remedy to be used the morning after a night of hilarity, Hooper at once kindly said, "I would recommend a good stiff dose of—"

"Lead," cried Damon, bringing his fist down hard upon the desk. "I wish that I had had a pistol; I would have given him the contents of it. I see that you, with your usual penetration, have guessed the state of affairs. I was waylaid last night on my way home from Williamson's. No wonder you look astounded. Who would ever think of robbers in those woods? The man and I had a rough and tumble fight," added Damon dryly.

Hooper was of strong, stocky build, but at these words he gazed askance at Damon's lithe sinewy form, which was apt to look deceptively light to the uninitiated, and respectfully inquired, "You finished him?"

"I routed him. But he set upon me so suddenly from behind that I was no more than able to defend myself."

"Did you lose anything? Watch? Pocket-book?" anxiously inquired Hooper.

"Only a bunch of blank wills that I had in my pocket. A package about the size of this," said he, holding up the money.

"Perhaps the robber thought the package was bills instead of wills."



"Of course, he must have. Suppose I had had this money with me? He might have got away with it. And all this trouble and worry over Mr. Williamson, who, when I got there was drinking beef tea and anxious for a game of cards. I was provoked with him for getting me out on that false alarm, but I made the best of it, so instead of drawing up his will, I sat down to a game of cribbage with him. He is a fiend on cards; that's the reason I was so late starting for the train."

"It seems mighty strange," pondered Hooper, soberly, "but that man must have known something about this money."

"That's why I got so nervous," returned Damon quickly. "I began to think that you too might have been attacked. So to satisfy myself I came here from home, just as soon as day broke. I made something by the operation," he went on triumphantly as he began to undo the bundle he had brought in with him. "In the scuffle I lost my hat. I lighted a cigar fuse and found my hat, his hat, a pair of gold spectacles, and a revolver." Damon took out each article as he mentioned it and placed it on the desk.

Hooper eagerly bent over and took up the revolver.

"Look out for that pistol," cried Damon nervously. "If you are anxious to hurt some one," he added satirically, "suppose you point it at Albert." He indicated with a nod of his head a very small boy, who, a short time before, had slipped into the room unobserved and who was at that moment perfunctorily drawing a large feather duster across a chair.

Hooper did not even deign to look at the object of Damon's remark, and thereby lost the calm look of disdain levelled at him and the pistol. Notwithstanding his indifference, the boy shifted his position from before the chair to behind it. It is best to be careful, even if one is not afraid.

"Ah!" exclaimed Hooper, attentively examining the revolver, "it's marked J. K. on the inside."

"I know it. I did not sit up half the night examining those things for nothing. I think though a detective will do better on this case than we can. So you had better put these things—and the money—back in the safe. Then go to the State Police Office in Pemberton Square and tell Mr. Broome that I wish to see him immediately."

After putting the articles and the money in the safe, Hooper disappeared into the private office and Damon resumed the reading of his mail. Presently he opened a letter and gave a low whistle as he read:

"Dear Sir:

A friend of ours named Burton will call upon you soon and introduce to you the owner of the \$20,000 sent to you—"

"Here, Hooper!" called Damon to that young man, who had completed his toilet and was just hurrying out. "Wait for Mr. Broome if he is not there. I wish to employ him and no one else."

Then Damon went on to read:

"His name is Pythias Prince, and from our long acquaintance with Mr. Burton, we are so well convinced of his integrity that his order you will be fully authorized by us in accepting."

Damon laid the letter thoughtfully on the desk. "Can it be possible that there are two Pythias Princes in this city?" he asked himself. "Such an odd name, too. Would to heaven the money belonged to our Pythias, and yet, it cannot be. Pythias says his father died poor and besides never was in New Orleans, at least, not to my knowledge. It will pay to ask Pythias."

While thus musing, he suddenly became conscious of a shuffling movement behind him, and he quickly turned his head in time to see his office boy briskly engaged in brushing the dust off the desk onto his back.

"Pray don't mind me," remarked Damon, sarcastically.

It was very evident that the boy did not mind him, for he kept on wielding the brush industriously, probably with the mistaken idea that his master minded dust no more than he did.

With a deft movement Damon confiscated the duster. "Why this unusual industry?" he quietly demanded. "You are not often predisposed to manual labor. This office should have been dusted long ago. By the way, what time is it?" Damon looked at his watch. "Nine o'clock! I had no idea it was so late. Young man, why did you not get here earlier this morning?"

For a second the boy uneasily shifted his feet which were encased in wide-spreading boots and looked as if they had been handed down to him from some larger brother, then he answered with a calmness born of conviction:

"I needed my sleep."

"However good your reason may seem to you," answered the lawyer, with a faint suspicion of a smile, "it, somehow, fails to convince me. Here, take this duster and hang it in the closet and then take these briefs to Brigham Brothers and remember," he said solemnly to the boy who reddened under his fixed gaze, "to get enough sleep to-night to enable you to reach here at a quarter past eight to-morrow morning."

Albert carefully scrutinized the address on the package of briefs before putting it in the pocket of his jacket. As he leisurely left the office, Damon looked after him with the comfortable feeling that although he was sure to be slow he was equally sure to be reliable. At the door Albert almost tumbled over the feet of a man who was about entering the office.

"Is this Mr. Adams?" asked the visitor, as he entered, looking inquiringly at Damon.

"Yes," answered he, facing the man. "Won't you be seated."

The visitor took the offered chair and placed his hat and cane upon another. Then he took a letter from an inside pocket. "Will you oblige me by reading this?"

"Certainly. Oh yes," he remarked, suddenly looking up from the letter, "Hawkins Brothers wrote me in reference to a Mr. Burton—"

"That is my name. Charles Burton."

"Indeed!" Damon gave the man a sharp look, but although he sat where the light from the window fell upon his face, it was so shaded by the large, blue glasses that he wore and by his rather long curly hair, that Damon could make out little from it.

"They also wrote of a Mr. Prince," continued Damon, after a slight pause. "The nature of my instructions requires that both Mr. Burton and Mr. Prince should have their identity clearly proved before I take any action."

"Of course, of course. I am Mr. Charles Burton—"

Damon preserved a discreet silence.

"Doesn't my assertion in connection with the possession of that letter prove my identity?" asked Mr. Burton, pompously.

"I beg your pardon, sir, it does nothing of the sort," answered Damon, tranquilly. "The name Burton is not mentioned in this letter. Have you the envelope in which it came?"

"No", he answered, slowly. "I lost it, unfortunately, from my pocket yesterday.

"The envelope is of small importance after all," assured Damon, upon whom the man's embarrassment was not lost. "In any case, you will have to establish your identity by witnesses. What is your city address?" asked he in a matter of fact tone.

Burton smiled coldly. "This is a lawyer's way of doing business, I presume?"

"Why, yes," replied Damon in surprise.

"I always supposed the word of a gentleman was sufficient."

"It is, on many occasions, I am happy to say," calmly returned Damon. "But let us suppose a case. Suppose you had lost the letter with the envelope, and a gentlemanly appearing man, like yourself, had presented it to me with the assurance that he was Charles Burton. Would you give me credit for ordinary shrewdness if I had taken his word for it?"

The stranger hastily arose, as if highly offended.

"I wish the word of a gentleman was sufficient," said Damon, politely. "But you should bear in mind that our business is of a legal not a social nature."

"Excuse me, sir, I see my mistake and ask your pardon," he answered, apparently mollified by Damon's conciliatory attitude. "I am totally unacquainted with law and lawyers, and this must be my excuse: A desire to benefit this young man, Mr. Prince, has led me to undertake the task of securing for him his rightful inheritance."

His words which were spoken softly and in all humility, did not entirely convince the lawyer. To him who was used to meeting all kinds of people, this man's remarks seemed to lack the true ring of sincerity. "Is your Mr. Prince in this city?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Yes. And at an early date" —he hesitated—"probably to-morrow, I shall have the pleasure of introducing him to you, and of proving to your entire satisfaction our respective identities."

"Which done, in accordance with my instructions, I shall be most happy to pay the money to Mr. Prince."

Mr. Burton took up his hat and cane. "Oh, by the way, have you deposited the sum?"

"No I never deposit in my own name the property of others." Damon's gaze unconsciously travelled towards the safe and his visitor's glance quickly followed it.

"Excuse my question. It was really none of my business," laughed Mr. Burton. "I thank you for your courtesy in answering so frankly. Your remarks do you honor. Many lawyers are not so scrupulous as you are. Good morning."

"Good morning, sir," Damon answered, affably escorting his visitor to the door. Damon walked back to his desk and stood looking out of the window. "This \$20,000, considering the short time it has been in my possession, has caused me an astonishing amount of annoyance," he mused, a frown gathering on his brow. "I fear that this is not the end of the trouble, either," he added grimly.

Suddenly a low moan fell upon his ear. He turned in alarm and beheld a young woman in black and closely veiled who had fallen, apparently in a faint, into a chair just within the door.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A WOULD-BE DIVORCEE

BEFORE the startled Damon had time to reach his unexpected guest, she opened her eyes—eyes that looked starry even beneath her heavy veil.

"I am not faint," was her hurried remark. "I never fainted in my life," she explained, suddenly sitting erect in the chair as if ashamed of her weakness.

Notwithstanding her assumption of strength, Damon hurried to the silver pitcher on the table and brought her a glass of ice-water of which she took only a sip.

"Perhaps it was the long stairs," he suggested, sympathetically, when he saw that she was not really in need of a restorative.

"No, no, I got a fright—and when one is a little tired—" her voice broke. "I mind things more when I am tired. I hope you will pardon my intrusion," she said, with a quick change of tone.

"Ah, madam," protested he, "intrusion indeed!" It was not often his office was brightened by a visitor as beautiful as this slender, graceful young woman.

"I came in here to escape—" She gave a gesture of repugnance.

Damon's color rose. "Is it possible you suffered an insult in this building?" His indignation was aroused, and he stepped to the door and opened it, but was detained from going into the hall by a soft touch on his arm.

"It was no stranger," she said, earnestly. "I think it was my husband."

Damon quietly shut the door and meekly sat down. "I am sorry for your husband—poor devil," he added under

his breath, a wave of sympathy for the unknown man sweeping over him.

There was an awkward pause.

"That is," began Damon, "I mean that I am sorry you find it necessary to avoid your husband."

For an instant she hesitated; then her words poured forth as if it was a relief for her to talk:

"I have not seen him for over a year. It was in New Orleans that we separated. I would never have deserted him, but oh, I was so glad when he left me. I hoped that I would never see him again. I had no idea he was in Boston, but I am sure I saw him in the hall a few minutes ago. He has changed considerably, but I would know him anywhere. He did not recognize me—my veil—"

"Your veil?" politely queried he, with his gaze steadily fastened upon the black floating gauze in the hope that she would lift it, so that he might see if her face was as sweet as her voice, which, he judged must be a beautiful contralto.

But his visitor had evidently forgotten the existence of her veil, so Damon reluctantly came back to the business at hand and inquired: "Since you have separated, why mind if your husband unwittingly crosses your path?"

"Our child," she faltered. "He might take her from me."

"Oh, I see," replied Damon, thoughtfully. "You are not legally separated."

"Eternally!" she cried, clasping her hands vehemently.

"All very correct, no doubt,—from a moral point of view," answered the lawyer laconically. "But the child—"

"Can be taken from me at any time," she said, completing his sentence. "That his why I am afraid of him. I am alone here and friendless."

"Friendless?" he echoed.

"Don't misunderstand me," she eagerly interposed, roused to protest by the pity expressed in his voice. "I am not afraid for myself, it is for my little girl. If he



chooses to take her—Oh, how I wish I was beyond his power!"

"You can be by getting a divorce."

She shook her head hopelessly.

"I will undertake your case," said he, quietly.

"What great kindness," she said, with indrawn breath.

"I wonder if I can ever repay you, Mr. Adams."

Damon involuntarily glanced at his office door where his name plainly showed in black letters upon the ground glass pane.

"Yes," he replied, "my name is Adams, Damon Adams. But there is a firm of lawyers, Damon & Adams, so I call myself professionally D. Adams. Our letters were apt to get mixed, so I abbreviated my name. It was easier for me to cut off my first name than for them to cut off a partner."

"And yet you have no scruples about cutting off my partner." Her smile died as quickly as it came. "How easy it is for me to laugh."

"I hope it is," was Damon's fervent reply. "None of us laugh enough. Although I have seen men laugh when the sentence of death was being pronounced on them by the judge. But that only proves to me that laughter is not always a sign of mirth. Long ago I came to the conclusion that laughter is oftentimes merely a case of relieving the nerves as tears relieve the feelings. The surface of things does not deceive me; I am used to probing deep. We lawyers can read faces."

With a start she threw back her veil. Her face, at first glance, seemed no prettier than a score of pretty faces one meets in a day's travel. But if one took a second look and somehow people were apt to—one's glance lingered long on her eyes. They were a dark gray that seemed black at night, and were alive with expression, mischievous, sad, gay, alert, according to her mood. And best of all, she seemed to be wholly unconscious of their great beauty. If there was any fault to be found with these expressive

eyes, it was that they looked out too frankly upon the world. A demure woman habitually lowers her eyes.

It took Damon a long while to thus understand the wonderful play of her eyes, but at his first glance he had observed that they were very bright and also noticed that the soft brown hair grew about her brow and neck in such distracting rings and curls that he wanted to touch them and ask if they were real. He remembered reading a story where the author devoted three whole pages to describing just such curls. Three pages! Three chapters would not do justice to these fairy tendrils.

With an effort Damon brought his thoughts back to business. He rose and motioned the young lady to a seat by his desk, then seated himself. He dipped his pen in the ink.

"Your name?" he asked, firmly gazing at the paper on the desk.

"Ethel Burton."

"Burton?" He paused with uplifted pen.

"Yes, Ethel Burton. B-u-r-t-o-n."

"New Orleans—Burton— This was a startling coincidence." Damon wrote the name slowly—"Burton." She must have met the man in the hall just after he had left the office.

"Your husband's name?" asked Damon, reluctantly.

"Charles Burton."

Damon shot a swift glance at her and almost groaned. Was it possible that this lovely creature was the wife of that detestable man? He shut his lips tight together and wrote the name.

"And your maiden name?" asked Damon, his gaze fastened on the paper before him.

"Ethel Tyler."

"Ah!" He drew a breath of relief and leaned back in his chair. Then there was a legitimate reason for his strange attraction for the woman before him. "Ethel Tyler." At the mention of this name the laughing face of a school-girl stole across his memory.

Ethel smiled quizzically at his earnest scrutiny. "I recognized you at once," she said, half reproachfully, "although when I slipped in here I had no idea it was your office."

"You were such a little girl when I last saw you," he answered slowly, his gaze never leaving her face. "I remember very distinctly, however, that when your father died you went away with your mother to New Orleans, her native place, and left us all disconsolate."

She gave a quick look about the handsomely furnished office. Her glance finally rested on the calm, well-bred, and handsome man before her. She smiled wistfully at the thought of the old school-days, as she said: "I am happy to see that you rallied from the blow."

A foolishly fond remark—and he knew it would sound foolish—Damon would have uttered had he not just then espied Hooper beckoning to him from the door. With a word of excuse to Ethel, he hastened to Hooper.

"Mr. Broome will call this morning," said Hooper in answer to Damon's questioning look. He lowered his voice: "Miss Louise is coming up the stairs."

"Admit her to the private office by the outer door— and tell her I will see her shortly."

While the lawyer was delivering this order, his clerk was eyeing discreetly, but critically, his employer's fair client. "Pretty and interesting," was his inward comment. "Divorcée," he added shortly. "The homely ones never come for a divorce," he reflected with a sage shake of his head as he left the room.

Ethel Burton rose when Damon returned.

"Pray don't let me detain you," she urged. "I can call again. I am sure I have detained you too long. Besides, I must return to my little girl. I left her in charge of my landlady while I went on an errand. I did not intend to stay away over an hour."

"Where are you stopping at present?"

"Twenty-eight Brockton Street."

"May I call on you and learn the full particulars of your case?"

"If you wish to be kind enough to take that trouble."

The look of gratitude he received fully rewarded him for any amount of trouble he might endure for her sake.

"I will call in the near future," he said, following her to the door.

On the threshold she turned and said, earnestly: "Being alone in a great city is not conducive to cheerfulness, and when one unexpectedly meets a trusted friend it is hard to restrain one's feelings. That is my excuse for telling you my troubles so freely."

Damon raised his hand in protest against her apology.

"You are the only friend I have here, Mr. Adams, and I thank you for your great kindness to me."

Her low, sweet voice stirred in him tender memories of innocent boyhood days. "Prove your gratitude," he pleaded with outstretched hand, "by calling me Damon, just as you used to do when we were boy and girl together."

She frankly placed her hand in his and softly said: "Good-bye, until we meet again—Damon."

He looked after her retreating figure, then gently closed the door and stood there for a few moments buried deep in thought. Then he went back to his desk and wrote her address upon the paper beneath the notes he had taken.

"Ethel Burton," he repeated, carefully folding the paper and putting it in an inside pocket, "and to think that that cad is her husband. It is very evident that my distrust of him is not misplaced. He's a brute. If he is a villain we will soon unmask him. I am glad Mr. Broome is coming here this morning. Charles Burton, Pythias Prince, and the attempted robbery—there is mystery enough for him to unravel. Meanwhile, I must not forget Louise."

So saying, he opened the door to the private office and smilingly beckoned to that young lady who immediately ran towards him in welcome.

"You are anxious to see what's left of me, I suppose?" he questioned, holding out his hands to her.

"You seem to be all right," she answered. As if not quite satisfied, she drew him to a window and in the sunlight which flooded that part of the office, and carefully scrutinized his countenance.

"Oh, I am so glad you escaped unhurt," at last came her heartfelt words. "Now, don't you wish you had spent last night at our house, as I wished you to do?"

"To be teased by a little puss like you?"

"Why do you always treat me like a baby?"

"A baby!" he exclaimed in mock indignation. "Why at this moment you look more like a doll. A pouting doll, to be sure, but, nevertheless, one of those pretty blue-eyed, fluffy-haired— By the way," he asked, as if struck with a sudden thought, "why doesn't your hair curl?"

"Because I brush it instead of burning it on a hot iron," was her calm reply.

"No, no, not those stiff, home-made ones. I mean soft ringlets that flutter in the warm air—"

"Damon, don't be flippant." She turned severely away and sat down beside the window, gazing out with apparent interest.

"The opposite roofs are not particularly beautiful, still, I suppose they are more pleasing to contemplate than is my face," returned he, humbly.

Louise made no comment, nor did she turn.

"Your indignation is justifiable. The idea of my calling a young lady a doll when she thinks she is old enough to marry."

"Ah, Damon!" she sprang up, her cheeks aflame. "I rely upon you to straighten matters. Mother is so unyielding and Pythias is so headstrong. I fear that unless you use your diplomacy—"

"This is what brought you to my office so early this morning," laughingly interrupted her friend. "Schemer!"

"I did not know of your adventure until Hooper told me of it just now," she protested.

"The details of the story lost nothing in his hands, I'll be bound. It is very evident he does not believe in allowing his imagination to grow rusty from disuse."

"Indeed, I enjoyed his company while I waited for you to finish your business. Was it a lady?" she asked mischievously.

"Yes, an old schoolmate."

"Who?" she quickly asked, catching a little note in his voice that awakened her curiosity.

"Ethel Tyler."

"What? You don't mean it? The dear. Why didn't she wait to see me? She was older than I, but surely she hasn't forgotten me." She paused and looked anxiously at Damon's sober face. "Is she in trouble? Money matters?"

"Just one half-dozen questions. Which shall I answer first?"

"Poor creature! She is in trouble," she exclaimed with conviction, "or you would have answered at once. You would not have parried my question with another."

"Yes," replied Damon, ruefully, "I confess I am a coward in that respect. I dislike to make people unhappy. Still, if you must know the truth—she is poor and homeless."

"Poor and homeless?" Louise repeated mechanically. "No, it is not possible that beautiful Ethel Tyler whom I used to look up to as some goddess—Why I can't imagine such a state of affairs," she concluded, weakly.

"There is no need of imagine it," said he, grimly, "the hard facts are there. And what is more, her husband—yes, she is married—has deserted her."

Louise put her hand to her heart as if in pain. "Deserted! Why she was never alone; we all loved her." And the gay vision of the laughing Ethel in her bright plaid dress and gray furs flashed across her mind. "We all loved her." Louise repeated, her thoughts on the bygone days when she used to wonder if an angel could be more

beautiful than her childhood's idol—Ethel Tyler. "She shall come home and stay with me," she cried, impulsively. "She has a child."

These words fell like ice upon her heart. Was it possible the world could be such a cruel place? If the noble Ethel were thus unhappily stranded, where could ordinary people find even contentment? Had Louise given voice to her thoughts, no doubt Damon would have philosophically answered that extraordinary people by their very temperaments were excluded from ever being really contented. But he, all unconscious of her bitter trend of thought, went on to say:

"She is afraid her husband might get ugly and steal the child from her."

Louise remembered how Ethel once darted through a ring of boys and snatched from within the enclosed circle a small boy who was being unmercifully pounded by a bigger boy. Not one of the onlookers had dared to stop the quarrel. Ethel had not only stopped it, but, with the small boy whimpering and cowering behind her, had faced the bully with scorn and defiance in her flashing eyes. "Coward! You shall not hit him again," she said, in righteous indignation. A cheer came from the group of shame-faced boys, and Ethel, with her charge, broke through the circle unharmed. Thinking of Ethel's sturdy spirit and strong sense of justice, Louise shuddered at the thought of what might be the outcome of a quarrel between her and an unscrupulous man, over the possession of her beloved child.

"The poor creature! I must go to see her at once," broke from Louise's lips.

"I knew you would," answered Damon, warmly. "She is in need of a good friend. Her address is twenty-eight Brockton Street. Hooper!" he called.

Hooper appeared at the door of the private office.

"Will you escort Miss Mowry down to the door. Then go to Court and when Jones vs. Jones is ready, let me know. I have a plea to make."

Hooper and Louise had hardly left the office when Pythias walked in, exclaiming:

"Say, old man, I heard you were in a tussle last night. Were you hurt?"

"Did your father ever live in New Orleans?" was Damon's irrelevant reply.

"Jones vs. Jones," is on early, called Hooper, appearing in the doorway.

Damon immediately went to his desk to get some papers.

"Miss Louise is down in the doorway waiting for a car," whispered Hooper to Pythias.

"Did you ever live in New Orleans?" repeated Damon turning around; but Pythias had disappeared.

Damon put on his hat; as he was leaving the office, he said, to his clerk's unmitigated astonishment: "Hooper stay here until my return from the Ethel Tyler—Jones case."



## CHAPTER IX

### DETECTIVE BROOME

"TYLER—JONES case," repeated the puzzled clerk. "Great Scott!" He started back in alarm and leaned against the desk for support. "I hope Mr. Adams' head was not hurt in last night's bout. Lots of men have gone around for hours with a fractured skull and not known it."

Mechanically raising his hand to his head as if to make sure that his own cranium was in a normal condition, his fingers came in contact with his hair. With a gesture of impatience, he vigorously rubbed his hand over it; but the kinks remaining obstinately tight under this treatment, he determinedly went to a table in one corner of the office and poured a liberal quantity of water on his handkerchief, and then, with the air of one who had a disagreeable but urgent duty to perform, he strode to the looking-glass and began to sop the offending curls.


"For my part, I like beauty not self-decked and curled until its pride is over-plain," said a voice behind him.

The handkerchief fell from Hooper's hand, as he turned in surprise to behold a tall, stout, middle-aged man, with twinkling grey eyes, who had noiselessly entered the office and was scrutinizing the clerk with evident amusement.

Hooper stooped and calmly picked his wet handkerchief from his boot, where it lay like a bit of damp moss on a rock.

"Up to this moment I thought only women were vain," chaffed the visitor, seating himself comfortably in a chair.

"Did you?" composedly asked the young man with a parting look in the glass at his wet hair, before he sauntered slowly towards the desk. "What do you know about women, Mr. Broome?" he quizzically asked a minute later as he seated himself.



"Enough to keep away from them," was the grim reply. "When they allow such as you, Smith, to practise law,"—Mr. Broome laughed unctuously—"it is no wonder they admit women to the bar."

The color mounted to Hooper's face at the thought of his Minerva in a public position before a gaping, curious crowd, and he immediately retorted:

"Women should stay at home."

"And let their husbands go to the bar—and then to the devil," suggested the detective, with a facetious smile. "I'll be hanged, though," he added, warming up to his subject, "if I don't think that women have as good a right as the men to—"

"Go to the devil?" asked the clerk, dryly.

"Say, Smith, why don't you sub-let that bright mind of yours?" queried his friend, cheerfully. "It might be used nights when the moon is not out—to illuminate the State House dome."

After offering this suggestion he took out a cigar and lighted it, saying as he did so: "You don't smoke in working hours, I believe." Then with a sudden change of tone, he asked: "Where are the things, boy?"

Hooper brought the articles from the safe and laid them on the table. Mr. Broome arose and carefully examined each one. After a while, he took them up one by one and said: "A slouch hat, a highwayman's mask, a false beard and a revolver. Humph! If Adams had captured the pantaloons we should have had nearly all the robber in our possession."

"Will these clues help you any?"

"Help me? I'll have the robber in twenty-four hours. Why, man, I have worked up a case from a single hair." He seated himself near the table where he could keep his eyes on the clues. "I don't mind telling you the story while I am waiting for Mr. Adams," he graciously remarked. "Oh, it was a neat bit of work!"

The detective, cigar in mouth, leaned back in his chair

in blissful retrospection, and the clerk, quite carried away by the elder man's enthusiasm, leaned forward and earnestly whispered: "I think I would like to take up your line of work."

Mr. Broome sat up stiffly in his chair. "Stick to the law, young man—it's better for you," he haughtily commanded, being rather roughly brought back to the dull present by his companion's naive remark. "Well, you see, about twenty years ago," he presently began, puffing contentedly away at his cigar, "I was sent out to work up my first case. Some plate had been stolen from a pantry."

"What kind of plates?" asked Hooper, who from his knowledge of the law had learned to be specific.

"Perhaps you think it was crockery plates; but it wasn't. Silver plate, I mean. Sugar bowls, milk pitchers, epergnes."

"Spoons?"

"An epergne is a kind of centre-piece," corrected Mr. Broome. "Haven't you seen them in pictures? They look like overgrown cake-baskets. Well, you see, I looked around but found no clue or sign. I'll be blowed," ejaculated the narrator, his hand coming down on his knee, "if I didn't think I'd have to throw up the job, when, what do you think?"

Hooper made no answer, but leaned farther forward, his face alive with interest.

"In a plate of butter which some lazy servant had left in the pantry, I found a tell-tale hair."

"What color?" The questioner ruefully felt of his own damp locks.

"Bright red. A perfect flame of a hair."

"Didn't it light you to the criminal?" interrupted his listener, with a hearty laugh.

"Just so," assented his friend from behind a cloud of cigar smoke, "I'll be darned if it didn't do just that thing."

"How?" doubtfully asked the clerk, stopping in the midst of his laughter.

"If you will be kind enough to let me finish my story

without so many interruptions, I may be able to gratify your curiosity," was the severe reply. "It was this way: nobody in the house had red hair. For a wonder, none of the servants had, either. I found out all about the visitors who had come to the house within the previous fortnight—both the friends of the family and of the servants; but I'll be hanged if one of them had red hair or anything like it."

"A mighty queer case," interposed Hooper, regardless of Broome's previous warning as to interruptions.

"It was that, Smith. By luck I found that a cousin of the cook, Bridget Madigan, whose name was Patrick Flaherty, sailed for Ireland the day following the robbery. There was my man!"

"Why, did he have red hair?"

"It was my business to find out," sternly answered Broome, "Besides, I wanted to go to Europe," he added laconically.

"Did you go?" was the eager question.

Mr. Broome took the cigar stub from his mouth and carefully set it on the edge of the table; then he looked at the young man in pained astonishment. "Hear that infant!" he cried, raising his eyes to the ceiling. "And he wants to be a detective! Of course I went to Europe. Didn't stop for extradition papers as I would have, if it had been a forgery or murder. Anyway, I didn't want to go to Washington—I had been there once before. I made up my mind to follow my man, catch him, and induce him to come home with me, of his own accord."

"How did you succeed?"

"Hold up there with your avalanche of questions. Don't travel ahead of my story." The aggrieved Mr. Broome abstracted another cigar from the row in his vest pocket, and lighted it. "I followed him across the ocean," he continued between puffs, "to London—"

"I thought you were going to Ireland."

"I'll get there if you will only give me time. Don't you suppose that I wanted to see lovely rural England?"

Hooper did not care to answer this question in the negative, particularly, when "lovely rural England" was rolled about in his friend's mouth as if it were some choice morsel not to be overlooked by any self-respecting epicurean traveller.

"Then I followed him across the Irish Sea, all over the Emerald Isle, right through the Lakes of Killarney—"

"What!"

"Across the Channel to 'Gay Paree,'" continued the story-teller, scornfully ignoring Hooper's exclamation, "down to Rome, the Eternal City—which I called the infernal city, on account of a fever I caught there—then on to Constantinople. Oh, Smith, there was life for you!" he cried, closing his eyes in sudden ecstasy. "It was there I got him."

"By the hair?"

"Yes, I got tired of travelling and found it time to bag my game."

"Was it a hare?"

"Yes, it was a hair," answered Mr. Broome, not at all nonplussed by his listener's flippancy. "But to all appearances it was black—dyed, I surmised. One night I got up a quarrel with him over a woman—" he explained with a knowing wink, "grabbed him by the hair of the head and found—"

"It red at the roots."

"No, he wore a wig."

"That beat you completely," said the disappointed Hooper, who had been expecting a thrilling climax to this highly interesting tale.

"Not at all, not at all. It takes more than that to phaze one of our craft," cried Broome, triumph written on every line of his face. "I got him home and put him in jail."

"What for?" was Hooper's puzzled question.

"What for? To wait until his hair grew out, of course. And it did—a beautiful red. In due time I had him sentenced to prison for three months for the larceny of plate valued at two hundred dollars."

"How much did it cost to catch him?" asked Hooper, doubtfully, after a pause, during which the detective arose and again carefully examined the articles on the table.

Mr. Broome immediately took out a well-worn, red note-book and consulted it. "Just two thousand, one hundred and sixty-nine dollars, and eighty-seven cents."

"Wouldn't it have been cheaper to let him go?" weakly protested the would-be detective.

"Do you expect we officers of the law to save money when we track thieves? Detectives labor to sustain principles, not to save money," explained Broome, virtuously. "You are ignorant of the first laws of thief catching—I advise you to stick to the law," he added in disgust.

"I think I had better," admitted the clerk. "It would never do for me to run off to Europe at a minute's notice."

"Ah, but think of Constantinople with its Lalla Rookhs!"

"Rooks? I thought Constantinople was noted for camels. Rooks?" he repeated, thoughtfully. "Why they belong in English cathedrals."

"You are thinking of ravens," answered his companion, blandly, "and please remember," he added, "that ravens congregate in the belfries, not in the main part of the cathedrals. By Lalla Rookhs I mean houris," and he gayly blew a kiss to an imaginary bevy of almond-eyed Eastern beauties.

Hooper looked long and steadily at Broome, as the idea forced itself on him for the first time that Broome, the detective, had been talking for the mere sake of killing time until Mr. Adams returned.

"Don't yer 'ear the East a callin,'" quoted his waggish friend.

"No, I don't," doggedly answered Hooper, who had come to the conclusion that his friend knew no more about the East than he did—which was very little.

"Ah!" Broome smiled and cocked his head knowingly on one side. "Better attraction here? Some peerless beauty, eh?"

"That's just about the size of it," acknowledged the young man. He walked to the window and stood looking out sulkily, with his back to the detective. After a pause, which Broome filled in by softly whistling a cheerful refrain, Hooper, who could not long remain mad with anyone, turned and said: "Broome, I am a changed man since I first met her."

"That accounts for the careful toilet you were making."

"Hang the toilet!" growled Hooper, throwing himself back into his seat. "I was simply trying to straighten out my hair. Of course, an old bachelor like you will laugh at me," he began, rather awkwardly, "but I might as well tell you the truth—I am pretty hard hit."

Broome dropped his bantering manner and at once became serious. "Laugh at you? I am glad of it! I believe in such things. I am too old now to get married—lived too long in single harness to run freely with a mate. But if I was young and had my life to live over again, I'd hitch up. Love? There is nothing better in all this wide world for a man than the love of a good woman."

He moved to one of the windows and stood drumming restlessly on the pane.

"How much do you think it would cost to furnish a flat?" came in a timid voice from the chair.

Mr. Broome turned, and in a business-like manner whipped out a fat, black note-book and began to figure. "Well," he briskly answered in a few minutes, as he paused, book in one hand and a pencil in the other, "you had better take one of your new-fangled, two-by-five flats where they have everything but room, for then you will need only two pieces of furniture to an apartment. Of course, if she is fat—"

"She is not," protested Hooper. Partly overcome by his own enthusiasm and partly by Mr. Broome's sentimental example, he cried: "Away with your fat, sluggish hours! She is like a wild fawn."

"Wild or tame, it's all the same so long as she is slender."



I hate to see a big woman in one of those flats," fumed Broome, who, like most old bachelors, was inclined to be fussy where women were concerned.

Aroused to eloquence by this sympathy, Hooper arose, and with one hand outstretched, cried, exultantly:

"My girl—"

"Is in jail," shouted a voice from the door, and Albert hurried into the office.

"You lie!" roared the clerk, springing towards the boy, grabbing him by the throat, and shaking him as a cat would a rat.

Like a flash Mr. Broome sprang between them and tore the gasping, struggling child from the infuriated man's grip. "Cut that out, Smith. Do you want to kill the kid on account of his miserable attempt at a joke?"

"Taint a joke," panted Albert, from the shelter of the detective's broad back. "Miss Minerva has just gone into the Court Square station between two policemen, and I ran all the way here to tell you," cried the boy, his hand to his throat, where the imprint of Hooper's fingers showed in four red streaks.

Whippings were of daily occurrence in Albert's life. He took them as a matter of course; for was not every pleasure in life, such as tormenting girls, stoning cats, and throwing chunks of ice at dogs and horses, invariably followed by some sort of a beating? But a choking! The boy's lip curled in rage and he showed his small, white teeth, as if he wanted to bury them in Hooper's white face.

"Come, out with it, young one," hastily commanded Broome, who realized that the girl must be in some trouble.

"I told yer once Miss Minerva is in jail," repeated the child, and tears [that no amount of beatings could wring from him, started to his eyes at the thought of Minerva, to him the embodiment of all that was most beautiful, being led away to pass the night in a damp, underground cell.

At last, realizing that Minnie was in trouble, Hooper made one bound for his hat. "Come, I will give you, money," cried the contrite man.



Albert immediately ran towards the door, his face bright with the thought of this unexpected reward. On the threshold he paused. "How much?" he anxiously queried, the ruling passion of his race—making a good bargain—for a moment overcoming every other feeling.

"Fifty cents—one dollar," shouted Hooper.

Albert dashed out of the door, quickly followed by Hooper, who, as he did so, called to the detective:

"For the love of Heaven, Broome, take care of the office until I right this awful mistake."

## CHAPTER X

### AN ARREST

EARLY the same morning Minerva awoke with the idea firmly fixed in her pretty little head that this day she would go to Boston. She was fond of making visits to that city; in fact, she liked nothing better than to leave the drowsy stillness of Riverdale behind her, and roam, unknown, unnoticed, through Boston's bustling, crowded shopping district with its long rows of large windows, into which she could peer, to her heart's delight, at the attractive array of lace frilled gowns, splendid cloaks, befeathered hats, and many other alluring articles of feminine attire. On this particular morning she was doubly anxious to go to town, for she wished to return the envelope she had found in the garden, to Hooper, the supposed owner, as soon as possible.

So, immediately after breakfast when Louise announced her intention of going to Boston, Minerva's face fell. With Louise away from home there was little chance for Minerva to shirk the household duties that day. But this young lady, unlike less aggressive natures, never meekly submitted to adverse circumstances. Whenever it was possible she bent them to her will. Therefore, after breakfast, as she and her aunt were setting the dining room to rights, during one of Mrs. Mowry's abrupt pauses in a long, rambling conversation, Minerva casually remarked:

"Mrs. Wharton thinks you have a fine figure."

Mrs. Mowry carefully flecked a speck of dust from the top of the polished mahogany dining table and said nothing. But unconsciously she held her head a trifle higher.

"She said you had a wonderfully straight back," pursued Minerva, her attention seemingly taken up with arranging

the newly-washed breakfast dishes in their respective places in the china closet.

Her aunt proudly drew herself up to her full height.

"It's what they call a French back," she graciously explained. "I inherited it from my mother. She was as straight as a ramrod until the very day she died. Louise has her father's figure—and his disposition," she added with a sigh, as she gazed sorrowfully out of the window as though that painful thought was almost too much for her to bear with Christian fortitude.

The bright sun was playing hide and seek on the lawn beneath the trees, and a gentle wind stole through the window, blowing the muslin curtains against Mrs. Mowry's dress. She was, however, impervious to the gentle influence of the summer morning and remained standing in gloomy thought until her niece, who did not relish the melancholy turn the conversation had unexpectedly taken, sweetly asked:

"A French back is a flat back, isn't it, auntie?"

"Yes. That kind gives no chance for a dress to wrinkle." And Mrs. Mowry, her ear trumpet in one hand and a feather ther duster in the other, turned and gazed with satisfaction over her shoulder, in the quaint, old mirror at her neatly fitting morning-gown.

"You remember Mrs. Wharton's black silk dress with the blue figure in it—the one she looks so nice in? Well, that same goods has been marked down from one dollar and a quarter to seventy-five—in Jordan's. The advertisement was in last night's paper." Minerva spoke softly, her back to her aunt.

"Oh, dear!" cried that lady, sinking despairingly into the nearest chair. "It will all be snatched up before I get a chance to go to town."

Her niece carefully placed a tall blue vase, which was filled with fragrant white blossoms, upon the lace square in the centre of the table, then she stepped back and gazed critically at the effect, as if this artistic arrangement was, at that moment, the all-engrossing thought in her mind.

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"Why not let me go for the goods? If I go now, I can be back in time to help you get dinner," at last came in dulcet tones from the demure looking young lady.

"I don't know but what that's a good idea," chuckled the unsuspecting woman. "Go and get ready and I will finish up the work. First, get me my purse. It's behind the clock," she added in response to an inquiringly look from Minerva who, knowing her aunt's haunting fear of a sudden onslaught of burglars, was not quite sure in what new place the purse had been secreted. Quickly abstracting the purse from behind the top turret of the tall old clock, which was drowsily ticking away in the corner, Minerva handed it to her aunt and joyfully skipped out of the room.

In ten minutes she came down, her eyes sparkling and her cheeks glowing at the thought of the happy outcome of her well-laid scheme. Mrs. Mowry, who had been busy figuring during Minerva's absence, handed her some money with the solemn admonition:

"Get fourteen yards—and make sure that it is not damaged in any way. And while you are in town you may as well get me a paper dress pattern—princess back. Minerva!" she called, to that young lady as she hurried down the walk, "be sure you come back soon and not loiter on the street."

Consequently about ten o'clock, Minerva, a triumphant smile on her face at the thought of the pleasant surprise she was about to give Hooper, tripped briskly along Washington Street in the direction of Mr. Adams' office. Suddenly she heard a shuffling sound behind her, and turning, she looked down with surprise into the large dark eyes of a small boy who gazed amusedly up at her.

"Why Albert!" Minerva showed her small white teeth in a smile which Albert blandly returned.

"I saw you when you crossed the street from the depot," he volunteered proudly.

"Where have you been?"

"Down there."—he pointed in the direction of State

Street—"on an errand for Mr. Adams. Before that I was up on the Common, throwing sticks in the Frog Pond for a dog to catch." His smile expanded into an amiable grin, wherein the tip of his long aquiline nose seemed to touch his full red upward curving lip.

"Whose dog?" asked she, in surprise.

"I don't know," was Albert's cheerful response.

"The Common?" asked his questioner in puzzled tones.

"Why that's quite a distance from State Street."

"But there's no dogs on State Street."

"Oh," doubtfully answered Minerva to this would-be convincing remark. "By the way, I wonder if Mr. Smith is in his office."

The boy shook his head in the negative. "Won't be there for half an hour, when Mr. Adams goes to court. My! Look at the steam-roller!"

They had just turned into Court Street and Albert immediately paused in delight on the curbstone to watch the machine, that like some gigantic monster pushed its ponderous way up and down a short section of the narrow street. Minnie also paused, but not having a mechanical turn of mind she soon turned her attention to the people who had gathered in idle curiosity on both sides of the street.

Directly across the street, on the edge of the curbstone, stood an elderly man who amused her greatly by his interest in the big roller. Suddenly, her gaze was arrested by a white, set face beside this man. So white and strained looking was this handsome young countenance, that Minerva looked apprehensively downward—just in time to see a hand at the elderly man's vest pocket. The astonished girl leaned forward with a low cry of surprise, as she unconsciously pressed her hands against her breast where lay hidden her cherished engagement ring. The next instant the thief's white, slender hand swept downward from the pocket and like a flash went backward out of sight.

For a second she stood transfixed. In that second the thief stepped backward into the crowd. The thought of

his escape brought to life her temporarily benumbed senses. She turned excitedly to a man beside her. "A watch—it has been stolen," burst from her trembling lips.

"What's that to me?" was his indifferent growl.

Minerva, her hands still clasped to her breast, gazed helplessly after the thief, who was quickly making his way through the crowd towards Scollay Square. Then she appealed first on one side and then on the other to the stolid people about her, but they, not having seen the cause, could not understand her excitement when she breathlessly enlisted them to catch the pickpocket.

"Pickpocket, did you say?" asked a voice from behind, and a man hurriedly pushed his way to her side.

Minerva pointed towards Scollay Square where she could just see the top of the thief's black derby disappearing around the curve of Cornhill.

"Is it the man in the brown Derby?" hastily questioned the newcomer.

"Yes," Albert took upon himself to answer, for although he did not see the pickpocket, he was most anxious to participate in the glory of his capture.

The man bounded across the street in pursuit of the brown derby which was fast disappearing around the bend in the street. His sudden, stentorian cry of "Stop thief!" caused the startled crowd to turn from the fascinations of the roller, and as one man, follow in his wake, like dried leaves scurrying in a storm.

Strangely enough, the innocent victim of this commotion stood on the edge of the curbstone blissfully unconscious of everything but the big roller which puffed and snorted back and forth upon the new road-bed, like some confined spirit angrily protesting against its evil fate. Albert and Minerva, who had not moved from their positions hastily called to him. He looked up with a start and his sudden movement swung the end of his heavy gold chain free from his vest pocket. He looked blankly down at his watchless chain, then with a helpless, despairing gesture, hurried off to the nearby police station.

Albert gazed fearfully about the almost deserted street. "Let us get away," he urged. "They will come back and nab us." "They" referred to policemen whose ways, the boy had learned from experience, were dark and mysterious.

"Certainly not," was his companion's indignant retort to this well meant but mistaken suggestion. We will wait to see if the man gets his watch. It isn't at all likely the officers will bother about us."

Alas! Too true was Albert's prediction. In a few minutes two policemen bore down upon Minerva and politely took her in charge. Albert shrugged his shoulders in disgust at this inevitable outcome of Minerva's lack of faith in his superior wisdom. Nevertheless, he trudged valiantly after her—always at a safe distance from her dangerous escorts—until they turned into Court Square. At sight of the abhorred police station, with a crowd of excited people surging before the door, his courage ebbed. Turning, he ignominiously fled towards Mr. Adams' office, in the wild hope of getting Hooper to rescue the unfortunate Minerva from the hands of the dreaded blue-coats.

That young lady was too incensed over the theft to deem herself unfortunate—even when she was being pushed and piloted through the gaping crowd by her two burly, expositulating escorts. Nor did she realize her peculiar position until she reached the station door, when she heard a sudden cry of fear. Turning in the direction of the familiar voice, she beheld, on the edge of the crowd, Louise gazing at her, her eyes dilated with terror. And small wonder that Louise clutched Pythias' arm in horror when she saw her young relative, whom she had left peacefully washing dishes but a few short hours before, being forced into a police station by two officers. A sudden flush of shame suffused Minerva's face, but before she could give her cousin a reassuring glance, she was swept through the door.

On one side of the short, narrow entry in which she found herself was a small room which was filled with that part of the crowd who had been agile enough to squeeze

within its narrow limits. Ignoring the passage these men had made for her by pressing close together, she paused emotionless in the doorway and stared aghast into the centre of the crowd, for in the very midst of these onlookers—stood the thief.

Before she had even time to gasp at his audacity, an officer quickly asked: "Is this the pickpocket?"

"Why, I never saw this person before in my life," protested the girl, gazing in dismay at the dirty looking specimen of a man in a dilapidated brown Derby whom the officer had dragged from behind the door.

"Oh, honest to goodness, miss!" snuffled the man with piously uplifted hand. His guardian immediately cut short his protestation by unceremoniously thrusting him behind the door.

Minerva turned her anxious gaze upon the little white haired captain behind the desk in the corner, and her lips trembled when she met his gravely expectant look. Immediately, a death-like silence fell upon the room. A sudden, sickening sensation came over her, when, after a moment's pause she turned towards the ghastly face in the crowd, whose eyes gazed over and beyond her. She had not seen the watch in this man's hand. Suppose, after all, he was not the thief? His presence here showed that he thought he was above suspicion.

"I should hate to condemn an innocent man," at last she faltered, "but I am sure—" then her voice rang out clearly, as she pointed to the white, handsome face—"I saw that man's hand at another man's pocket."

Before the last word left her mouth, a cry of satisfaction rose from the crowd. The Captain clapped his hands, and at the signal the crowd parted, disclosing to the astonished Minerva the one whom she had accused, securely handcuffed. A sudden wave of pity swept over her for this young man, whose warped ideas of virtue had placed him outside the pale of decent society. When he was led away by two policemen, a sob almost escaped her at the thought



that her act would perhaps serve to push him still deeper into the depths of crime.

One of her officer escorts, however, at a sign from the Captain, led her out of the crowd into the next room, and hastened to assure her that her pity was wasted upon one of the slickest pickpockets known to the New York and Boston police.

"Why, lady, we have often tried to catch him, but he has always been too slick for us. Think of it, we would have had to let him go to-day for want of evidence, if it hadn't been for you. A little miss like you ought to be proud instead of sorry that she caught that thief red-handed. And better still, you were able to identify him without a moment's hesitation, out of a big crowd of men."

Minerva refused to be consoled by this praise. She did not cheer up even when the anxious Louise and Pythias, after much difficulty, reached her side. She smiled faintly, however, when the same officer told her the watch had been found in a doorway where it had been flung by the man in the brown Derby."

"The man in the brown Derby?" cried Minerva, blankly.

"Yes, miss, it's an old game; the pickpocket, after pinching the watch from the chain with his thumb and forefinger, passed it back to his confederate in the rear. When the unexpected hue and cry was suddenly raised by our detective—"

"Was that man a detective?"

"Yes, and if it hadn't been for his quick work the men would have escaped. He had been detailed to that section for the purpose of ferreting out just such pickpockets who always frequent the crowds. Come, lady, the Captain wants you."

Minerva turned pale with apprehension when the polite little Captain took her name and address, and told her, quite as a matter of course, she would get a summons to appear in Court the next morning. At that moment, the wild-eyed, panting Hooper burst into the station, only to

be met with a flood of tears from the distracted girl who sobbed out:

"Oh, Hooper, I shall have to go to Court."

"Court?" echoed Albert, from his secure position just outside the door. It was even worse than he had anticipated. At the awful word he closed his eyes as if to shut out the harrowing spectacle of poor Minerva standing in the prisoner's dock. The sound of her sobs fell like lead upon his heavy heart, when he heard her entreating Hooper to take her home.

Forgotten were dress goods, princess-back patterns, likewise stray envelopes, in her desire to leave the wicked city. It was not long after Hooper hurried her from the station when the pickpocket was bailed out. But, of course, Minerva did not know this, nor that when once free the pickpocket never returned for trial.

As they walked quickly towards Mr. Adams' office, Minerva clung closely to Hooper's arm. The time taken was short, but her self-introspection was rapid. She realized that although one in the beginning may bend circumstances to suit one's own sweet will, other circumstances may intervene and perhaps change the whole current of one's life. She shuddered as she thought of the dark corridor, the stuffy room, the blanched face of the culprit, and imagined how much worse it would have been if Albert's fears had been realized; if she had been locked up in a dark, dismal cell, with only a board to sleep upon and bread and water for sustenance.

## CHAPTER XI

### OLD FRIENDS IN NEW GUISE

IN the meantime, Mr. Broome, during the hour he was left to mind the office, found a good chance to occupy his peculiar talent. In fact, as he afterwards proudly expressed it, the hour was filled to the brim with golden opportunities, which, but for his timely presence, would have become merely lost or fleeting ones.

When Hooper made his hurried exit from the office, Mr. Broome, who did not allow one, or even two arrests, to disturb his equilibrium, calmly closed the door upon the sight of the fleeing individual and smiled in pity. "Wouldn't he make a precious detective! A mere bundle of nerves—he'd be down with nervous prostration inside of a month," was the sarcastic comment of this famous detective, who never in his life had been conscious of even one nerve in his own body.

Not but what Mr. Broome was willing to admit that the announcement of one's sweetheart being taken to jail was a little out of the ordinary, but if it was found that she could not be bailed out, then, he thought, and not until then, was the time to create a fuss. So, making up his mind to take things easy until Hooper's return, he proceeded to open the windows, in order to clear the atmosphere of cigar smoke; after that he arranged the chairs in orderly precision against the walls, then seated himself bolt upright at the desk as if awaiting a chance client.

"There's nothing like a good smoke for clearing out one's brain," he remarked complacently to himself. "I have had my smoke and now I am ready for my case—or any other that may turn up. Before making an arrest," he

mused, "I like a good drink—it strengthens you as the old woman said as she tossed off a glass of whiskey. As for cash—I never like to make a move until my personal expenses are paid. That's why I like to work for Mr. Adams; he's always so liberal, and better still, he's always a gentleman; he hasn't got one set of manners for the rich and another for the poor. Hullo, what have we here?"

He had turned at the sound of the door opening and saw a little, fat man, and a still fatter woman, standing hesitatingly on the threshold.

"Is Mr. Damon Adams in?" timidly asked the little lady.

"Just stepped out—he'll be back in a minute," briskly answered the unblushing Broome, as he hurriedly rose from his chair and advanced towards her with an affable smile on his face, and before Aunt Jane—for it was she—realized it, he had formally ushered her into a chair. When this duty was performed, he cordially motioned her companion to another chair.

"There's nothing like making customers feel at home," complacently thought Mr. Broome. "We've been having warm weather, haven't we?" he remarked, as he rubbed his hands together and beamed down upon the "customers."

"Yes, we have." Uncle Jim took off his hat—a large, soft affair—and began to fan himself with it.

"I wonder what tidal wave swept in these queer fish," said the detective under his breath. "Let me take your wrap," he urged, with a fatherly look at Aunt Jane. "You must be warm holding it." It would be a fine thing if he could have a case worked up for Mr. Adams by the time Smith returned, was the thought running through Mr. Broome's mind.

"My wrap? Oh, I wouldn't think of bothering you," returned she deprecatingly.

"Bother?" was the indignant protest. "This is what I live for," he declared, as he carefully hung the wrap on a

nail near the looking-glass. "That's the way to fetch them." he soliloquized. "After all, it takes very little praise to please a woman. They are a good deal like cats; you can always keep them good natured if you only take care to stroke their feathers in the right way."

"Where is Mr. Smith?" inquired Aunt Jane, with an anxious glance about the office.

"In jail," glibly responded the detective.

"Jail?" came in horrified accents from the little lady.

"Bail—bail, I should have said," corrected Broome. "He's bailing out a client. He'll be back in a few minutes," he explained with a nonchalant wave of his hand at an imaginary point of the compass, for to tell the truth Mr. Broome had not the remotest idea at that moment whether Hooper was in or out of jail.

"Isn't Mr. Adams well?" asked Uncle Jim, looking doubtfully at this stranger who seemed, in some unaccountable way, to have taken complete possession of the office.

"He is as well as could be expected, under the circumstances," answered Broome, as he sat down beside Uncle Jim and whispered in his ear: "He was held up last night and robbed."

"Robbed?" gasped his listener.

"Good Heavens! Who did it?" nervously broke in his wife.

"That's what I would like to know, and what I am here for. I intend to arrest the first person I see who acts suspiciously."

He looked so fierce that Aunt Jane rose precipitately and backed towards the door. "Come, James, we can talk to Mr. Adams some other time."

"No, we won't, either," was the sharp, decisive answer. "I put myself out to come here this morning, and I guess my time is as good as his." He bent toward his wife and said in a low tone: "I'm bound to get the load off my mind and see that the money gets into Mr. Adams' hands."

"I suppose you are right, father," admitted Jane, as she

sank resignedly into a chair. "As you say, it is best to get the money out of your hands. You are old and if you should go off suddenly I don't want to be bothered with any law matters. Minnie can get married to that nice, red-headed chap and won't be depending on her Aunt Mowry any more."

"Right you are, mother," responded James, gleefully rubbing his hands at the prospect of a wedding in the near future.

"What are these two jays trying to get through them," muttered Broome, after vainly trying to understand the drift of their conversation.

"Twenty thousand dollars is a pretty good sum to get out of a man, isn't it?" suddenly asked Uncle Jim of Broome, much to that man's surprise.

"Mr. Adams thinks so," was his grim reply.

"By the way, have you got any clues to the robber, Mr.—" James hesitated for a moment.

"Broome, sir. Detective Broome of Pemberton Square."

"You don't say so? And you are a real detective?" Aunt Jane whose mind at once began to teem with mixed-up visions of burglars, stolen silver, diamond robberies, and murders, solemnly gazed at the man before her as one might regard a strange being from another planet.

"My name is—" began Uncle Jim.

"James," she severely interrupted, "come here. Pray don't tell him you are a retired fish dealer," she pettishly whispered in the ear of her obedient spouse. It was very evident the worthy woman considered a detective as one not only from a different but from a higher sphere.

"All right, I won't," replied James, who was willing to give up the pleasure of reciting a history of his past life for the sake of maintaining peace in the family. "Mr. Broome, I am glad to know you," said he, with outstretched hand. "My name, sir, is James Kent."

"James Kent!" In the middle of the handshake Mr. Broome suddenly paused with a low whistle of astonish-

ment. He crossed over to the table, picked up the revolver and let his gaze rest upon the initials engraved upon it.

"Oh, dear, how careless he handles that pistol." Jane gazed in fearful distrust at this complex creature of a detective who charmed her one minute with his gaiety and terrified her with his sternness the next.

"He's all right; he knows how to handle it," whispered her husband, soothingly. He turned to Broome. "I am a pretty good shot myself. I think I would make a good highwayman," he added, facetiously.

"I don't doubt it."

"Hush with your foolish jokes, James; his eyes look as if they had turned to stone."

"I don't care," doggedly answered he to this low spoken warning. "I am my own man and I have plenty of money to back me—though I must say," he gazed ruefully at his large hat—"I hated to pay five dollars for this hat. The clerk insisted I ought to take this kind," explained Jim to Mr. Broome, whose gaze was levelled upon him. "He said it cost a little more but it exactly suited my style—"

"Style!" interrupted Mrs. Kent, indignantly. "It makes you look like a Quaker turned cow-boy."

"By thunder!" savagely muttered the detective. "The nerve of them—two escaped jailbirds, no doubt—trying to do the innocent game on me. And, by jove, they almost pulled the wool over my eyes. Hat, indeed," he added under his breath, as Mr. Kent proudly held it up for his inspection. Aloud he asked sauevely: "How did you lose your old one?"

"How did you know I lost it?" questioned Jim, in surprise. "Perhaps as you are so smart you can tell me where Mrs. Kent lost her gold specs?" he eagerly asked.

"Are these the ones?"

"Why, mother, I'll be darned if here ain't your specs and my hat. Well, well, I am glad to get it back. This new one don't seem to suit me, somehow." The next moment a sudden thought flashed across his mind. Transfixing Mr. Broome with a suspicious glare, he haughtily

demanded how he came into possession of the property.

"I'd give one hundred gold dollars for his nerve!" said that man between his teeth. "But this old codger will soon find to his cost that the guileless farmer act is not to be worked on me. It's a wonder he hasn't tried to sell me a gold brick."

"After all, I suppose we ought to be glad enough to get our things without asking for too many apologies," went on Uncle Jim, peaceably. "Much obliged to you, sir. What do you mean? Haven't we a right to our own property?"

"Perhaps you have, and perhaps you haven't," grimly answered the detective, who stood guard over the articles. "Before giving up these things I wish to ask you a few questions. Bear in mind," he added quickly, "I don't want any confessions. You know you are not obliged to incriminate yourselves."

"Confessions! Incriminate!" stormed Uncle Jim. "What do you mean, Mr. Loon?"

"Broome," calmly corrected that man—"Cornelius Broome. A rather long handle for a short name, so my friends—mind you, my friends—call me Corn. This is my meaning plump and plain. I don't mean to say that you are the parties who attempted to rob Mr. Adams—"

"The Lord forbid!" piously ejaculated James and Jane, with hands uplifted in protest at the very thought of such a vile imputation.

"But I must say," went on Mr. Broome, without noticing this interruption, "that circumstances point to you as accessories before the fact."

Mrs. Kent's blood seemed turned to ice when this sentence, which to her fairly reeked of the courtroom, rolled so glibly from the detective's tongue. Not so easily frightened was her better half. He doubled up his fist and shook it under Mr. Broome's nose, crying fiercely: "Look here, sir, you shan't bulldoze me."

"Come, come," coaxed Mr. Broome, with a soothing touch on Mr. Kent's arm, "the less trouble you make, the



better it will be for you in the end. You must remember, James Kent, you have acknowledged this to be your hat."

"Yes, and I am not ashamed of it either," he hotly retorted.

"And you, Mrs. Kent, acknowledged these to be your glasses?"

"I am sure of 'em. The bow has been mended and shows the j'int," answered the good, thrifty soul, who was not so overcome by fright that she was going to allow her gold spectacles to pass from her keeping without a struggle. "And Mr. Kent's initials are on the inside of the hatband."

"Yes, and also on the revolver," triumphantly exclaimed Broome.

"Are they?" asked the thunderstruck James. "I wonder how they got there."

Mr. Broome stifled a wild inclination to throttle the little man before him. "I wonder if he's ever going to let up on that innocent game?" he commented, then he asked, as patiently as he could: "Didn't you speak of the sum of twenty thousand dollars—the very sum that Mr. Adams came near being robbed of?"

"I can explain my remark and why I am here," eagerly interposed Uncle Jim.

"I wish for no explanations," warningly broke in the detective. "My duty is clear—to have and to hold you two as accessories before the fact, as I have said before."

"Yes, I heard you say it before"—James' face which was red from excitement turned purple with rage—"and I don't want you to say such things to me again."

"If Mr. Adams would only hurry back," wailed Aunt Jane, her hands clasped in terror at this near approach to a quarrel.

"You are anxious to see Mr. Adams at once?" asked Mr. Broome, a quick plan of action flashing across his mind.

"We do, can you find him?"

"I'll try," was the quiet reply.

"Oh, thank you."

"Pray don't mention it," responded the detective, as he took up his hat.

There was a sarcastic ring in his voice which Aunt Jane, in her delight at this happy turn of affairs, failed to notice. Her face lengthened, however, when a moment later he turned back at the door just as he was about to leave the office.

"Remember," he cautioned them, "I put you upon your honor not to leave this room while I am gone. On your honor!"

Jane leaned back in her chair and gave a sigh of relief when the door at last closed on this dreadful man who seemed to be invested with such mysterious power. But her sigh quickly changed into a sob when she saw her husband comfortably seat himself by the desk, pick up a newspaper and calmly begin to read it.

"James Kent, have you no manhood left in you?"

The poor man looked up from the paper a trifle bewildered by this unexpected reproach, and said, rather sheepishly: "We might as well take things easy until Mr. Adams returns; then everything will be all right."

"Will it?" was the wrathful rejoinder. "How about that pistol?"

"My initials on another man's pistol is a rather queer coincidence," he admitted, slowly.

After a short pause, during which James went philosophically on with his reading, Aunt Jane suddenly took her cloak down from the nail, and said in a low tone: "If I was sure he was gone, I'd run."

"Run, what for?" demanded her husband, indignantly. "We haven't done anything wrong."

"When you are all tangled up with a heap of detectives asking questions, you won't know whether you've been doing wrong or not. You'll be sorry yet that you did not heed my advice. Why, that Mr. Broome would rather take us up than eat a meal. Catch him to go near Mr. Adams. He's gone for more detectives."

Her husband laughed heartily at this sally. "Well, at that rate he must be afeared of us."

Goaded to tears by his indifference she began to sob and plead. "Oh, do come away, dear. He has no right to keep us here."

James laid down his paper, helplessly. He always grew uncomfortable at the sight of his wife in tears. "Ma, you'll be a second Eve; trying to tempt an honest man to run away like a thief. Would you have me break my word?"

"When you are breaking stones in jail, James Kent, don't forget that I warned you."

The damp walls of an imaginary jail did not loom up so forbiddingly in his mind as in that of his timid spouse. Nevertheless, he was not willing to undergo another wearisome cross-examination by Broome, so after a moment's hesitation, he crossed to the door to see if the way was clear.

"I guess we had better go," he said, coming back to his wife, and speaking in a low voice, "especially as that pistol mystery may take a long time to get cleared up."

Hardly were these words out of his mouth when Jane grabbed his hat from the table, hid it underneath her wrap, and then thrust her glasses into her pocket. Together they stole towards the door, like criminals making an escape. Just as Uncle Jim's hand stealthily turned the door-knob, a cold, grating voice fell on their ears, and caused the man and woman to turn in terror.

"Just what I suspected," continued the sarcastic Broome, from the doorway of the private office into which he had stolen from the hall entrance. "Honesty would have remained. By your own guilty act you are committed, and I am justified in detaining you. I now believe you to be not only accessories before the fact, but accessories to the fact."

Uncle Jim stood in abject silence, too humiliated by the situation to protest against Mr. Broome's false accusation.

Aunt Jane sank into a chair and burst into tears of vexation.

Mr. Broome pointed toward Uncle Jim's old hat which had dropped at Aunt Jane's feet, from under the folds of her wrap, and laughed sardonically.

"Great Scott, Broome, what are you about?" exclaimed the astonished Mr. Adams, who at that moment entered the office.

"Detaining these two 'innocent' parties on suspicion."

"Why, Aunt Jane," cried Louise, hurrying in behind Damon. "What is the matter?" she whispered, fearfully, her arms flung protectingly about the weeping little lady.

"Uncle Jim, what has that horrid man been doing to you? asked her companion, Minerva, with a withering glance in the direction of Mr. Broome. "You old darling Uncle," caressingly murmured Minerva, who had recovered some of her usual sprightliness now that she was away from the depressing effect of the police station.

Damon, Louise, Pythias, and Minerva all gathered about Aunt Jane and Uncle Jim, with words of apology and condolence.

"Say, Broome, old man," jeeringly whispered Hooper to the discomfited detective, "don't make the mistake of being too smart."

"Well, I'll be blowed!" ejaculated Broome.

## CHAPTER XII

### SCHOOLGIRL FRIENDS

"MR. BROOME, let me introduce you to Mr. and Mrs. Kent, uncle and aunt of Miss Mowry and Miss Minerva," broke in Damon's cool voice upon the awkward silence which followed Mr. Broome's exclamation.

"It was a great mistake," said the discomfited detective, with an apologetic bow to Aunt Jane.

"An error of judgment, actuated by an over-zealous interest in my welfare," quickly interposed the peacemaker, Damon, "which,"—he anxiously turned toward Mr. and Mrs. Kent—"I trust you will pardon."

"Of course, we will," gently responded the sweet-tempered little lady, who had entirely recovered her composure, now that her two nieces were by her side to comfort her with their ready sympathy.

"It would never have happened if the J. K. on the pistol had not misled me," persisted the detective, under the smart of his humiliating mistake.

"Why, what a curious coincidence," said Damon, a thoughtful pucker gathering on his brow.

"I'll be blown if it wasn't enough to make any detective lose his head," ejaculated Broome, looking for confirmation of his words towards the table, where Hooper and Minerva were.

"Mistakes are apt to happen," quickly spoke up Mr. Kent, in answer to this vehement outburst. "You were only trying to do your duty. No harm done. No harm done."

The truth of this last remark was very evident, so far as Aunt Jane was concerned, for at that moment she was intently listening with a broad smile on her face, to a funny

story that Hooper, with many expressive gestures, was relating to her and Minerva. Seeing his spouse so well occupied, Mr. Kent, who was warm and thirsty, tapped Mr. Broome on the arm. With an almost imperceptible nod, the detective followed him to the door and together they slipped from the office.

Upon their return fifteen minutes later, Mr. Kent found his wife with her bonnet smartly readjusted on her head and her wrap carefully folded on her arm, ready waiting for him.

"Come, James, we are going home with Minerva," was her whispered greeting.

In answer to her husband's exclamation of surprise over this sudden upsetting of their plans, Mrs. Kent quickly went on to say: "Minerva has just been telling me what a horrible accident happened to her this morning. Would you believe it, James Kent, while we two fat things were snivelling over our arrest—"

"I did no snivelling," hotly retorted James.

"Poor little Minnie," continued Jane, calmly ignoring his silly interruption, "was in a real station house, surrounded by a crowd of pickpockets."

"Great goodness, child!" Mr. Kent's jovial smile faded away as he gazed incredulously at his niece, who, to tell the truth, looked pale and worn enough to warrant the truth even of her aunt's exaggerated statement. "Come, you must go home to Aunt Mowry," he urged, without heeding the sickly smile which came over Minerva's face, at the thought of encountering Mrs. Mowry's severe comments upon her latest unfortunate experience. "My business with Mr. Adams," pursued Uncle Jim, "can wait until another time. Come, mother. Come, chicken. Aren't you coming with us, Louise?"

"No, Uncle," answered that young lady, hastening forward from the desk where she had been talking with Damon and Pythias. "I am going to make a call."

"Good-bye, then; we'll see you at tea," answered her uncle. "Good day, everybody."

"No, Pythias," softly protested Louise, a few minutes later, as with one hand on the knob she paused in the doorway to bid him and Damon good-bye, "you must not escort me even to the street."

"Stay, if you can, Pythias. I want to see you on business," interrupted Damon in his anxiety to clear up, without delay, the mystery of the Prince bequest.

Pythias looked expectantly at Louise, but receiving a warning shake of her head, he sat down beside the desk and mechanically took up a newspaper, all the while his gaze resting fondly upon her every movement.

"What shall I say to Ethel?" whispered Louise to Damon, the smile with which she had tempered the refusal of her lover's escort fading away at sight of Damon's white, care-worn face.

"What shall you say to her?" he repeated. "Oh, Louise, say anything that comes from the heart of one good woman to another in distress."

On reaching the street door she encountered Albert who was lazily sunning himself on the steps, and who, at the same time, was busily engaged in devouring a large, juicy pear, which had been bought with some of the money that Hooper had promptly paid him upon leaving the station. After kindly slipping a dime into his grimy hand, which donation was acknowledged by a blink of surprise, Louise hurried on her way. After a light lunch in a quiet, downtown restaurant, she hastened up Temple Place, along Tremont Street, and across the Common in the direction of Ethel Burton's present stopping place.

When Louise reached the small, shallow sheet of water, commonly known as the Frog Pond, which lies in a slight hollow near the centre of the Common, she involuntarily paused in her rapid walk and wistfully gazed through the intersecting branches of the intervening trees up towards the row of fine old houses on Beacon Hill. The majestic State House crowning the summit of the hill, seemed to her, with its golden dome rising in the air, to be too obtru-

sive in the flaunting glory of its pride, and somehow, too much in keeping with the restless activity of the streets through which she had just passed, but the row of adjoining houses, in their dignified simplicity of old-time architecture, seemed to emulate the quiet of a generation which has long since passed beyond toil and trouble; and as Louise gazed sadly about her at the quiet, green spot that yet remained for the good of weary human beings in the heart of the busy city, this peace, begotten of a past generation, seemed to float down and about her and blotted out, for the time being, all feverish thoughts of discontent.

In direct contrast to the wide, sunny, green Common, was the narrow, dark, steep street to which she soon found her way on the farther side of Beacon Hill. The tall, dingy, brick houses on both sides of this street seemed to her to be the acme of shabby-genteel dreariness; and the thought of living in one of them would have seemed intolerable to Louise who was accustomed to the fresh air and bright sunshine of the country, but for her sudden glimpse of the river, which in the afternoon sun shone like a strip of silver ribbon at the foot of the hill.

Pausing before one house more pretentious in appearance than its neighbors, Louise, after consulting the card in her hand, mounted the short flight of steps. Her pull at the bell was answered by a short, dumpy personage in a red cashmere wrapper and black, false crimps.

In answer to Louise's inquiry, she coldly volunteered the information that she had not the slightest idea whether her new lodger was in or out. Louise was not what would be termed fussy; she never looked for more than ordinary civility—certainly not effusion—from an utter stranger. But this—what Minerva would call frosty reception—accompanied by a suspicious glare, was a trifle disconcerting, especially from one who—to judge from the large sign, "Rooms," which hung conspicuously in the front window—might be supposed to welcome a possible patron with open arms.



"If you wish to go up and see," said this uncompromising individual, after what, to Louise, seemed a long, uncomfortable pause, "her room is at the head of the stairs, second floor, first door to the right."

Louise's light knock was answered by Ethel herself; there was no mistaking her. Her face was as round, her eyes as bright, and her smile as sweet as in the school-days of old.

"Good afternoon. I came from Mr. Damon Adams," murmured Louise, pausing shyly on the threshold, a picture of sweet hesitation.

"Come in," was the quick response.

"I suppose you don't remember me."

"No," answered Ethel, smiling brightly down upon her visitor. "But"—she invitingly drew a large arm-chair near an open window—"any friend of Mr. Adams is doubly welcome."

"I am Louise Mowry," said that young lady from the depths of the easy-chair.

"Is it possible?" Ethel's two hands went out impulsively and held Louise's in a long clasp. "Oh, I remember you, a little blond slip of a child, so quiet and demure. How good of you to come! How cheering to see some one from my old home!"

When uttering this last remark she glanced about her, and at the sight of the large room whose bareness was accentuated by the ugliness of the large-figured, old-fashioned green and white wall-paper, and upon which no amount of artistic arrangements of her few cherished books, pictures, and ornaments could bestow a homelike appearance, a slight frown gathered on her brow. This sign of displeasure quickly faded away when, the next moment she turned to Louise, and said, with a little, infectious laugh:

"I was quite young in those days, but you—why, you, couldn't have been much older than Lily."

Ethel pointed to the opposite side of the room, where

half-hidden by the voluminous lace curtains of the window sat a little girl, her long, golden curls falling heavily forward across her cheeks as she bent in absorbed interest over the book in her lap. At the sound of her name the child raised her head, disclosing a face of angelic beauty. Eagerly Louise held out her hands to this dainty creature, the miniature of her mother; a softer, fairer edition of Ethel. For she was very like Ethel, even in her gracefulness, thought Louise, looking up from the child at her side to where Ethel stood, with one elbow on the mantle-piece, her cheek resting in the curve of her hand. As Louise gazed admiringly at her tall, graceful figure, which in its long, clinging black dress was clearly outlined against the light background of the ugly green and white paper, she suddenly came to the whimsical conclusion that Ethel would present a beautiful appearance—even in the flaming red wrapper and black, false crimps of the uncompromising landlady.

"It isn't very pleasant here," Ethel hastened to say in apology, after Lily had once more become absorbed in her book. "But I don't mind being alone," she hurriedly added in answer to Louise's sympathetic look.

"Mamma, what does e-l-e-p-h-a-n-t spell?" came in a soft voice from within the folds of the curtain.

"Elephant, dearie—the largest of animals. When I say alone, of course I mean with Lily," explained Ethel, in a low tone. "Without her life would not be worth living."

The hard, almost reckless tone in which this remark was uttered, jarred upon her listener's sensitive nature. "You are so young, so beautiful," she protested, at sight of such hopelessness.

"Am I?" was the indifferent response.

"Oh, yes," breathed Louise, in admiration of the beautiful woman before her.

Ethel drew up a chair beside her old schoolmate, and sat down, leaning forward, with one hand held impressively in the air.

"Dear child, what does my beauty amount to?" she asked, bitterly. "It certainly counted for very little with

the man who had a right to appreciate it, and who should have protected me. You know"—she hesitated for a second—"Surely Mr. Adams must have confided in you that I am—a deserted wife. No doubt, I was much to blame," she added, contritely. "I know now I was too impatient."

She rose and paced up and down the room. "But other women have been impatient with their husband's faults."

Louise nodded in sympathetic agreement.

"And to think he could desert me!"

A look of pain crossed her listener's face.

"No, don't pity me, dear," she hurriedly entreated, "for I think now—and I am sorry to acknowledge it"—her voice sank almost to a whisper, "that my vanity is wounded, not my love—he killed that long ago," she added, dully.

"Don't cry, I beg of you." Ethel hurriedly bent over Louise in compunction. "I am not worth your tears. Indeed,"—she sank back wearily in her chair—"I have come to the conclusion there is not much in life that is worth the shedding of tears. Oh, how mean of me," she exclaimed, with a quick change of tone, "to spoil your visit in this cruel way. But my feelings have been pent up so long." Her gaze rested longingly on the sad, sweet countenance of the gentle girl before her. "I have had no one in whom I could trust. I know you are steadfast." She held out her hands almost hungrily. "May I count you as my friend?"

"Always," was the quick response, and then two hands met in token of a lasting friendship.

"I am in Boston to earn my living," said Ethel, after a pause. "I can sew. I also know an invalid who wishes me to go and read to her. I am not afraid of work—" She paused and glanced uneasily at the child.

"But what will you do with her?"

"That is my great problem."

"Why not pay us a visit?" cried Louise, impulsively. "Then Lily could be under my care while you are at work."

"Oh!" Ethel joyfully clasped her friend's hands. "If it could only be arranged! I am not nervous about Lily—she would be no trouble to anyone—but I dare not leave her alone. Her father, in his moments of rage, used to threaten to take her from me. By some cruel chance he is now in Boston, and I am in constant dread he may find us."

"I will ask my mother," continued Louise. "I am sure she will be delighted to have you come." She rose to depart in her eagerness to put the project into execution.

"I don't worry for myself," said Ethel, holding Louise's hand in parting. "It is only when I think of her—" She looked at the child and forgot to finish the sentence.

And Louise on her way home forgot Ethel's beauty, her fascinations, even her troubles, in the thought—which brought hot, blinding tears to her eyes—of that one yearning look of love the mother had bestowed upon her child, who sat half-hidden in the folds of the lace curtains, her long, golden curls falling across her cheeks, as she bent in absorbed interest over the book she held in her lap.

## CHAPTER XIII

### AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

LOUISE was up bright and early the next morning, sweeping, dusting, and otherwise getting in readiness, one of the large, front, disused rooms on the top floor of the house, for the occupancy of Ethel Burton and her little daughter. Louise had no difficulty in obtaining her mother's consent to Ethel's visit; that is, when she not only promised to take entire charge of the guests, but also held out the hope that she and Ethel together might do wonders in the way of fancy needle work for Mrs. Mowry, from which it can readily be seen that that lady, like many other people, could be agreeably tractable when her own comfort was not disturbed.

Later in the morning, when Louise was giving the finishing touches to the arrangement of the now spotless room, she heard, to her surprise, Damon's familiar footstep upon the gravel walk.

"Oh, lady, fair, put your hard work for a minute by," he quickly called at sight of her laughing face between the snowy muslin draperies.

"Why, Damon, what brings you here at this unusual hour?"

"Come into the garden, Maud, and I will tell you all you want to know, and more."

At this alluring promise, Louise disappeared from the window and in another minute was by his side, strolling across the lawn.

"I am so glad you had business out this way," she eagerly began, "for I have been so anxious to tell you all about my visit to Ethel yesterday afternoon."

"How is she?" was her listener's hurried query.

"She is very beautiful!"

Damon nodded his head in assent to this somewhat irrelevant remark, and at once became lost in the thought of the bewildering curls and ringlets that so softly clung to Ethel's brow, around her pink ears, and shapely neck.

"Oh, dear," continued Louise, sadly, "what a gloomy house."

"Gloomy, with Ethel Tyler in it?" broke incredulously from Damon's lips.

"It is gloomy, but what does it matter—" She clapped her hands exultantly together. "She is going to pay me a visit. Won't it seem good to have her here?" she asked with delight.

"Very," was the low but fervent reply.

"I am going to write this afternoon and tell her to come at once; we are all ready for her."

He breathed a sigh of intense relief and looked towards the sky in thanksgiving. Then he took her two hands in his. "Oh, Princess Louise!" he exclaimed, and gazing affectionately down upon her added slowly: "Or shall I say Priceless Louise?"

The tremor in his voice was lost upon his companion in her laughter over these new appellations which had just been added to the long list of whimsical names he had already bestowed upon her. During this conversation they strolled to the farther end of the lawn and had turned to retrace their steps, when Damon espied advancing up the lawn, Hooper Smith, whom he had sent on some business to a distant suburb. The clerk, after scanning every window in the front part of the house, quickly made his way to the garden at the rear, where Minerva sat on a rustic bench beneath a tree, busily, but sulkily plying her needle.

"Minnie!"

The industrious young lady quickly looked up, but as quickly looked down, and made no reply to his salutation.

"Well, you're a great girl not to give one word of welcome to a chap who hooked Jack from his work and came out of his way for the sole and only reason of getting one glimpse of you," said the aggrieved young man.

"If a glimpse is all you came for, take it." Queen Elizabeth's bearing towards the disgraced Lord Leicester could have been no more uncompromising than was Minerva's upon the utterance of these words.

"For goodness' sake, Minnie, what's the matter with you?" asked the astonished Hooper.

"Matter?" she repeated, as she viciously bit off a piece of thread from the spool she held in her hand. "How would you like to be flooded with one hundred and forty-seven cambric crosses?"

He looked apprehensively down, but instead of the billows of crosses surging and dashing against her feet he saw only a small but heavily laden, innocent looking work-basket. He looked up at Minerva who was impatiently jabbing the end of her thread at the eye of a needle, and solemnly shook his head without committing himself to a rash reply.

"Every one of them has to be sewed onto this," she said, after she had succeeded in threading the needle. She held up for his inspection a huge white linen square, upon which gleamed three red crosses that seemed to slink guiltily into one corner away from Hooper's fixed gaze.

After a long doubtful pause, he asked timidly: "What will it grow into—I mean, what will it be when it is finished?"

"A quilt—for a bed or cozy corner."

"I guess you mean crazy corner." It's needless to say, this remark was uttered under his breath, for why arouse a sleeping lion? If, under the circumstances, he could be permitted to compare his fair charmer with that kingly beast. "But of course you will finish it to-night," he cheerfully added aloud.

"By night?" Minerva wrathfully cried. "I'll never get it done. I've been working on it now for three months."

"And only three of the one hundred and forty-seven

sewed on?" gasped Hooper, his faith in Minerva's industrial powers receiving a "knock down blow" as he would have expressed it.

"One hundred and fifty," she corrected, bitterly.

The young man gazed blankly down at the crosses that loomed up like three roseate oases in one vast cold, white desert. If it took Minerva three months to sew on three crosses, in how many years—He hopelessly abandoned the problem of the finished quilt and sat down beside her in sheer helplessness. Now, if it was only a lawn or two to be mowed, or a cord of wood split!

"Every time Aunt Mowry gets provoked with me," broke in Minerva's angry voice upon his troubled thoughts, "she orders me to sew on this quilt."

"What's she mad about now?" whispered Hooper, with a wary look at the kitchen door to guard against the sudden descent of the redoubtable Mrs. Mowry in case she might see fit to come forth and continue the battle with him.

"She says it's because I got arrested yesterday. I think if the truth was only known," her voice sank to a significant whisper, "she is mad because I forgot yesterday to buy her dress goods. Aunt Jane and Uncle Jim, dear souls, tried to coax her to forgive me before they went home last night, but it was no use."

Minerva's feet kept time with her words, and to give greater emphasis to this last remark, she dug her heels into what she thought was the grass, but to her dismay it proved to be the basket which at this sudden onslaught toppled over, spilling its contents into a loose heap upon the grass. Whereupon Hooper burst into a wicked laugh, and she, after a moment's fearful hesitation, followed with a gleeful little chuckle. Suddenly, a gust of wind caught up one of the crosses and away it merrily flew through the air. Hooper sprang up in pursuit, while Minerva hurriedly fell upon her knees to gather up the remaining crosses.

"I've caught you," triumphantly called he, when his hand at last came down upon the truant cross where it had



settled upon the lawn as if for a moment's rest before taking another flight through the air.

"A good catch," said a quiet voice, almost in his ear.

The young man turned with a start and beheld—his employer.

In the excitement attendant upon the capture of the piece of cambric, Hooper had failed to notice Mr. Adams and Miss Mowry, who, standing within the shade of a large elm tree near the centre of the lawn, were deeply engrossed in watching the outcome of the chase.

"I had some urgent business out this way," at last stammered the crestfallen young man under the cool scrutiny of his employer.

"What a coincidence! You, too, had a case out this way this morning," said Louise, not realizing she had merely jumped to this conclusion. "Didn't you, Damon?" she added.

The clerk looked narrowly at Mr. Adams to catch his reason for neglecting his regular morning's work, but that young man with an imperturbable look on his face was apparently examining the cross which a moment before he had taken from Hooper's hand, and instead of offering any explanation for his unusual absence from the office, he dryly said:

"Give this artistic mystery to Minerva and then we will go back to Boston."

"Ah, Hooper, I forgot to give you this yesterday," declared Minerva upon his return. After carefully tucking the cross away in the basket, she drew from her skirt pocket an envelope. "I found it near the summer house the other day. I wonder who dropped it."

"Why, Charles Burton, you little goose," replied her companion, after reading the superscription. "Why did you save it? It isn't worth a cent."

"Minerva snatched the envelope from the grass where he had carelessly flung it. "Not worth a cent, you shrewd young man?" was her indignant retort. "Didn't I hear

Louise tell Aunt Mowry that her friend Ethel Burton was going to get a divorce from her husband, Charles Burton, and that Mr. Adams was going to attend to her case? Don't you see this envelope is a clue? Perhaps it is from a woman."

Hooper abstractedly pulled at his curls as if to gather inspiration from them. "How did Mr. Burton happen to drop the letter here?"

"How do I know?" demurred she, in answer to this sudden and useless question. "I have an idea. Perhaps Mr. Adams can find out. Look, he is waving to you," she added, warningly, with a nod in the direction of Damon, who, with Louise, was slowly making his way across the lawn towards the entrance to the grounds.

Down by the lilac bushes at the gate Louise stood long after Damon and Hooper had disappeared behind a bend in the road. "I wish Damon had someone to love him," at last she whispered to herself. She re-echoed this wish when shortly after, she made her way back to the large, front room in the top part of the house which was so soon to be Ethel's, and seated there by the open window Louise fell to pondering sadly over the puzzling freaks of the god Hymen who so often presided over the mismating of two radically different natures, while neglecting to notice others who, unmarried, seemed born for a domestic life. But the merry peal of the luncheon bell was the only answer she got to this vexing question.

Immediately after lunch, when the dishes had been washed and returned to the china closet, Minerva, after reassuring herself by a prolonged but furtive stare at Mrs. Mowry's grim visage, that the end of the quarrel was not yet in sight, mutinously returned to the garden and her sewing. She had scarcely taken a few stitches when her attention was happily diverted by the sight of little Albert leisurely approaching from the back gate. Around his large mouth lingered an almost seraphic smile and he seemed as free from care as a butterfly or humming-bird, if one might be allowed to compare the dingly attired boy

to such brilliant, radiant creatures. Certainly he had the instincts of these winged creatures, for upon reaching the outskirts of the garden, he hovered in idle content over some gayly hued blossoms that nodded to him a sweet invitation to linger.

"Come, come, Albert; don't be all day," called Minerva.

"Plenty of time," came the bland response from among the flowers.

"What have you got there?" queried the girl, in impatient curiosity. "Not that," she indignantly added, when in answer he proudly held up a blossom he had just ruthlessly torn from its native stem. "I mean the letter in your hand."

The boy carefully placed the purloined flower in the top buttonhole of his jacket before he said; "'Taint for you."

"Give it to me," she coaxed, when at last he stood before her, a picture of unruffled innocence.

His fingers closed tightly over the envelope in his hand, but he made no answer—unless his smile which had widened almost to a grin could be taken for one.

"Who is it for?" she asked in a tone, the calmness of which foretold the approach of a tempest.

Not recognizing this storm signal, Albert playfully whisked the letter around his head, then fell to examining the crosses which had just burst upon his view.

Under ordinary circumstances this characteristic reticence of Albert would have made her laugh, but this defiance—for in her present excitable mood she termed it defiance, even if it was cloaked under a calm smile—was too much to bear long in patience. "Give me that letter at once," she cried, sharply. "It may be of great importance to someone in the house."

At this imperious tone he dropped into her outstretched hands the crosses but not the letter. Minerva arose in righteous indignation, the white square in her lap falling unheeded at her feet. Mistaking this action for a sign of battle, Albert darted behind a tree, dragging with him, on

a nail in his shoe, Mrs. Mowry's cherished crazy quilt. From the meagre protection of the tree he coolly waited to see what his antagonist would do next. He ducked his head when she began to stamp her feet in impotent rage. The next instant his hand with the letter in it appeared around one side of the tree.

"For you," came his muffled voice.

"For me?" repeated the surprised Louise, who had just appeared at the kitchen door. "Please bring it to me."

He advanced warily, his gaze fastened upon the flushed countenance of the irate girl standing beneath the tree. Placing the letter in Louise's hand, he said: "Mr. Adams told me to give it to you." His errand accomplished, the boy slowly backed down the path until he was out of Minerva's reach, then he turned and ran like a deer across the lawn and out through the back gate.

"Oh, Minnie!" softly protested the tender-hearted girl at sight of the child's fear.

The penitent Minerva sank back upon the seat and shamefacedly brushed away a tear.

"How strange!" cried Louise, the open letter in her hand. "On Damon's way home from here this morning he met a fortune-teller. Thinking she might cause us some amusement, he told her to call on us to-morrow. Think of it, Minnie! What fun for us to have our fortunes told!"

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE LAW SHALL DECIDE.

SHORTLY after Damon had returned to his office and despatched by Albert the note apprising Louise of the fortune-teller's coming visit, Hooper made up his mind to "square himself" as he tersely put it, by offering an apology for being found out.

"I am sorry, Mr. Adams," he began humbly, "for neglecting your business this morning."

"Are you?" Damon was bending over his desk, and this remark, though muffled, plainly showed surprise at this sudden awakening of his clerk's usually dormant conscience.

"You have no idea how sorry I am," pursued the would-be penitent.

"No, I haven't," soothingly agreed Damon, while he gathered up some papers from his desk.

"My visit, however, may prove to be of great value—" Hooper paused impressively in the middle of his somewhat triumphant remark, and waited for a faint glimmer of interest from his employer. But that gentleman, with a bundle of documents held idly in one hand, seemed to be lost in a pleasant day-dream. The clerk impatiently coughed, as a gentle reminder that night was the accepted time to dream, and continued in a louder tone: "I went to Riverdale—" At the sudden mention of this name the document fell unheeded from the lawyer's hand to the desk—"for the purpose of hearing—"

"Hearing just one word from her," broke in Damon, with an ardor quite incomprehensible to his listener, who, it must be confessed, had intended to adorn his sentence with quite a different ending.

"To hear from her? Why I saw her," corrected Hooper, when he had partly recovered from his surprise.

"You saw her," repeated Damon, in blank astonishment. "Oh, yes, I forgot." He laughed awkwardly, "you were talking about Minnie."

"Who in thunder did you think I was talking about?" indignantly asked the clerk under his breath. "By the way," he added aloud, "Minerva found an envelope in the garden the other day, which she thinks you ought to look at."

This remark fell upon deaf ears, for Damon had turned his back, picked up his papers, and evidently forgotten that Hooper was in existence. Levelling a look of infinite disgust upon his employer, the clerk turned impatiently away with the determination to waste no further apologies upon a man who had already forgotten the occasion that demanded one.

Presently Mr. Adams turned towards the corner to which his clerk had retired in high dudgeon to seek the solace of a newspaper. "Hooper," he said, briskly, "I want you to go to Black & Black with these papers."

"Yes, sir," he responded, stepping eagerly forward. "And Minerva's letter?" he ventured to ask, when he perceived that Mr. Adams had at last come out of his brown study.

"Put it here on the top of my desk, and I will look at it as soon as I have time."

Hooper had scarcely left the office when in strode Mr. Burton, closely followed by a young, bloodless looking man, with thin blond hair.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Adams," said Mr. Burton, in answer to Damon's greeting. "Allow me to introduce to you my friend, Mr. Prince. Yes, sir," he added, somewhat pompously, "this is Mr. Pythias Prince, son of Richard Prince of New Orleans, deceased."

"Glad to know you," responded Damon, holding out his hand in welcome.

The newcomer, who, in some undefined, disagreeable way, reminded Damon of a white mouse, silently placed, for a second, a limp, clammy hand in Damon's, then noiselessly retired to a distant chair.

"I have come to-day, Mr. Adams," said Mr. Burton, as he comfortably seated himself in a chair by the desk, "to prove my identity as Charles Burton. I have the documents with me."

"Will you first allow me to ask you a few questions?"

"Certainly." Mr. Burton's manner was affability itself.

"My questions will be few in number."

"As many as you like," was the indulgent permission.

"Are you married?"

"No."

Damon looked at the man before him curiously.

"I mean—yes."

"And your wife's name?"

A dark, red flush passed over Mr. Burton's face. "What has that got to do with the case?" he asked, after a moment's silence.

"Everything."

After another pause, Damon said: "Surely you have no objection to telling me your wife's name?"

"No—why should I? Burton, of course—Ethel Burton."

"Her maiden name?"

"Sir," demanded his listener, haughtily, "what has that got to do with you?"

"Nothing. But—"

This quiet reply seemed to sting the man to a sudden display of rage. "Then why ask?" he protested.

"For a very good reason; it has some bearing on your case."

Mr. Burton leaned forward. "Suppose I refuse to tell?"

Damon shrugged his shoulders, which act caused Burton to glare with flashing eyes. Not a word spoke either man until at last Mr. Burton's defiant look fell before Mr. Adams' tranquil, persistent one.

"Your wife's name was—"

"Ethel Tyler," fell from the man's dry lips.

"And you, sir—" Damon turned quickly to the other man before Mr. Burton could utter another word—"are the claimant for the money which is now in my charge?"

The man arose from his chair, but before he had time to answer, Mr. Burton drew from his packet a bundle of papers.

"Never mind about the written proofs, at present," interposed the lawyer.

Mr. Burton sulkily placed the papers on the top of the desk within reach of his hand, before he sank back into his chair.

"Your name is Prince?" questioned Damon, kindly motioning the timid young man to a seat beside him.

"It is—yes, sir," answered that individual, with overwhelming eagerness.

"Your whole name is—"

"Pithus Prince."

"Pithus?" echoed his cross-examiner, sharply.

"He said Pythias," adroitly corrected Mr. Burton. "I heard him distinctly."

"I didn't," was Damon's cool response.

Mr. Burton's face turned white to the lips at this contradiction, and remained so even after Mr. Adams went on to say:

"I will allow, however, that he pronounced it correctly. Your age?" he continued.

"Twenty-six," glibly responded Mr. Prince.

"Your father was how old when he died?"

"Forty-six," was the hesitating answer.

"How old was he when he married?"

"Twenty-two."

Mr. Adams elevated his eyebrows. "Then you were born two years before your father was married? You can hardly claim his property, not having been born in wedlock," was the cutting remark.

Mr. Burton started up with a muffled oath. "But, sir,"



he expostulated, "it is easy to make mistakes on such matters. I might make you contradict yourself as easily."

"I doubt it, sir—if twenty thousand dollars was at stake; I'd learn the family register by heart." Turning to the claimant, he asked: "Have you anything about you to prove your identity?"

"I am marked on the arm with the letters P. P."

Mr. Adams curiously examined the man's quickly bared, extended arm, upon the pallid surface of which showed in blue and red ink the letters P. P. Mr. Burton's eyes glittered with satisfaction as he, too, bent forward to behold this proof.

After a few minutes' careful scrutiny, Damon dropped the arm and said: "These initials might stand for a dozen other names."

"Your conduct, sir, in this examination, has been very peculiar." Burton had pushed aside the cowed Mr. Prince and stood in a belligerent attitude before Damon.

"The case is a very peculiar one," was the quick response.

"Suppose you had a friend named Pythias Prince, and I should conduct his examination as you have done—"

"You have my permission to do so." Damon pointed toward the door, where a young man had just entered. "Mr. Burton, this is my friend, Mr. Pythias Prince."

Pythias bowed and came forward, looking in a puzzled manner from Mr. Burton's scowling face to Damon's tranquil countenance. "I will call again," he said, turning toward the door, when he at last realized that he had unwittingly broken in upon some private discussion.

"Indeed, no," exclaimed Damon, eagerly. "You came just in time for me to enter you for the twenty thousand dollars in my possession. Don't shake your head in dissent," he urged, "at least, not until I ask you a few questions about your father."

"Excuse me, sir," interrupted Mr. Burton. "I prefer to conduct this examination myself. It is my right."

"Proceed." Damon motioned Pythias to a seat beside him. Burton, however, remained standing.

"Where did your father die?" asked he.

"In Memphis, I believe."

"You believe? Don't you know?"

"I do not know even where he is buried," sadly answered Pythias, with downcast eyes.

"Humph! What day did he die?"

"I know neither the day nor the hour." Pythias drew his hand across his eyes as if to shut out some unpleasant memory. "He—he was lost to me for the last ten years of his life."

"Burton showed his teeth in a cruel smile. "A model father!"

"Don't say that again," remarked Pythias, quietly. "The man who utters one word against my father takes a dangerous risk."

"Come, come, don't get excited."

"I am not excited," was the calm answer. "I am simply stating a fact."

Mr. Burton bowed mockingly. "I congratulate you upon having so much filial affection. Did you know," he asked, with a quick change of tone, "that your father died a wealthy man?"

"I believe he died poor," answered Pythias, with conviction.

Burton laughed in triumph at this remark. "You can see for yourself, Mr. Adams, that I have as much reason to be dissatisfied with your Pythias Prince as you are with mine. I have complied with Messrs. Hawkins' instructions, both to you and to myself, but you manifestly do not intend to pay this poor"—he piteously waved his hand towards the corner of the office where his pallid friend sat huddled up in a chair—"young man his inheritance."

"At present, I do not."

"That means never," cried Burton. "It will not be the first time a big plum has fallen into a lawyer's hands and dwindled away in lawsuits. But I will make you—"

"Make me do what?" asked Damon, rising slowly to his feet.

"Disgorge, sir."

"I shall not part with the money," returned Damon, firmly, "until I sift this mystery to the bottom." He bowed pleasantly and stood in silence as if to end the interview.

"I know what you are," angrily cried Burton, as he fiercely caught up his papers from the top of the desk, "you sanctimonious prig."

Pythias sprang to his feet in hot wrath, but Damon, disdaining to notice the insult cast upon himself, laid a warning touch on his friend's arm.

"You would dare come between me and my wife, would you?"

Damon started back as if he had been shot.

"Oh, I have cut you at last," sneered the now infuriated man. "I know she was in this office for over an hour the other day. You advised her to get a divorce, did you? For what? To serve your own foul purpose. Let me tell you, Mr. Adams—" His large, white hand came heavily down upon the desk—"for every word of advice you have given, she shall pay dearly, to me—to me, sir, do you hear?"

"You brute!" Damon's face was ashen.

"Struck home, did I? So you are not the cold-blooded fish you seem to be?" triumphantly ground out Burton, between his set teeth. "There's a little red blood in your veins, after all?"

"I'll show you some day what I'm made of."

Burton laughed sardonically and started towards the door.

"I'll show you what I'm made of, Charles Burton," he repeated. "I believe you are Charles Burton. I believe that young man is your dupe, who has been coached to play a part, which he has done poorly. But were your proofs ten times as strong as they are, believing what I do, this case should go to the courts."

"And why?" asked Burton, momentarily at a loss for a more effective question.

Damon raised his right hand. "So that the law may decide between us."

## CHAPTER XV

### ANOTHER CLUE

LONG after the none too softly closed door had shut out the sound of Mr. Burton's taunting laugh, Damon, with one hand pressed upon his desk, the other clenched against his side, stood pale and motionless as if turned to stone. At length, to his friend's relief, he walked slowly to the nearby window and inhaled deep breaths of the pure air that swept refreshingly in. Although the hand that rested upon the window-sill was as firm as a rock, the greyness of his face bore silent testimony to the tumult raging behind his outward calm.

Pythias, whose wrath against Burton had given away before his anxiety for Damon, hurried to the window. "The scoundrel is not worth a thought," he exclaimed, his hand on Damon's shoulder.

"Oh, my friend,"—Damon threw out his hands like one who had reached the depths of despair—"it is of her that I am thinking. He will vent his spite on her—a weak, defenceless woman. Think of it, Pythias," he repeated wildly, "a weak, defenceless woman in the power of that brute! And I—Oh, God—I have been the cause of it."

"You the cause of it? What are you thinking of?" was the indignant protest. "Why, that man was born a bully and a coward."

"I understand that," hastily admitted Damon, "but he would have been content to let her alone had I not unwittingly crossed his path. Unwittingly, I say, for how was I to know," he added, contritely, "when that day she fled like some wounded creature to the shelter of my office, that that she also found a shelter in my heart? Yes, I am in love with her. You doubt it?" he questioned, in answer to

Pythias' incredulous look. "Did I not hasten to Riverdale this morning just to get a word from her? Did I not arrange the fortune-teller's visit, in hopes to see her one day sooner? Has she been out of my thoughts day or night since she crossed my dull life like a ray of stray sunshine?—and I imagined it was sympathy for her!" He laughed bitterly. "Oh, Pythias, I have been a deluded fool," he exclaimed. "And the shame of it," he continued, "that that man should be the one to bring me to my senses. All unconsciously I have been standing on the brink of a precipice—I am in love with another man's wife. And he, the brute, will use this knowledge to torture her." Damon ground his teeth in impotent rage. "He will torture her by inches. Coward that he is, to what depths will he not descend and try to drag her with him? She will feel the weight of his jealous wrath, and I, I am powerless to help her."

He threw himself forward, his head resting against the top of his desk, while great, dry heart-tearing sobs burst uncontrollably from him.

Wide-eyed, Pythias gazed in helpless wonder upon the sudden collapse of this man whom he had always considered to be a model of physical, mental and moral strength. At this unexpected sight of abject misery his own troubles lessened, dwindled, and vanished. He slowly rubbed his eyes as if awakening from a dream, as he suddenly realized how few in life really have to bear overwhelming troubles. And in that moment of enlightenment came to him a great power; from out of his friend's weakness was born in him a new strength.

"Something must be done to save her, and at once," he cried, decisively.

"If she was only with Louise she would have some protection," groaned Damon, without lifting his head.

"I should like to watch Burton's encounter with Mrs. Mowry," grimly interposed Pythias.

At that moment, Hooper's cheery whistle was heard in

the hall. Pythias quickly laid his hand on Damon's shoulder and gently pushed him into his chair before the desk. Immediately after Hooper's smiling face appeared, Pythias looked apprehensively down at Damon but that young man was sitting erect in his chair, apparently examining his mail with great interest.

"Everything O. K. at Black & Black's," volunteered the clerk, with satisfaction, as he proceeded to hang up his hat on a nail near the looking-glass, in the meantime not neglecting to take a furtive glance at his image reflected in the mirror.

"By the way, Hooper, where is Minerva's envelope?" asked Damon for the sake of gaining a moment's time to think.

"Here," began Hooper, then gazed in perplexity at the top of the desk. "Didn't you take it?"

"Mr. Burton did," eagerly interposed Pythias. "While you were questioning his companion, he picked up from the top of your desk an envelope, read what was on it, and hastily thrust it into his pocket with his papers. I supposed it belonged to him."

Hooper gave a low whistle of surprise. "His name was on the envelope."

"Ah! But who dropped it in Mrs. Mowry's garden?" Damon's voice died away in wonder.

The three men looked blankly at each other, until Damon suddenly broke the silence by saying, briefly:

"This is a mystery Mr. Broome must solve."

"Did I hear the sound of my name melodiously wafted across this threshold?" asked that gentleman from the door.

Damon rose hurriedly, as a sudden sickening sensation of weakness swept over him. Gathering together his fast waning strength, he laid a trembling hand on Pythias' arm, and said to the two unsuspecting men:

"I will leave you to talk over this affair, while Mr. Prince and I are absent a short while—on a matter of business."

"How are you, Mr. Broome?" asked Hooper, when they were alone in the office.

"Oh, I manage to keep on my feet in the thick of the battle."

"Battle?" queried the surprised clerk, who was never quite able to grasp the true meaning of Mr. Broome's metaphorical manner of speech.

"I am still in the ring," that man went lightly on to explain.

"You don't say so!" Hooper regarded the detective with undisguised admiration. "Did you train for it?" at last he whispered.

"What are you doing? Trying to make a prize fighter out of me? I referred to the battle of life. Smith, I think Venus—Aphrodite—what's her name—has turned your head."

"Do you refer to Miss Minerva?" asked his listener, somewhat stiffly, and with a marked accent on the Miss.

"That's the one; I knew she was some kind of a goddess. I came here for the remaining clues," he added, without heeding Hooper's cold stare. "I have something in my noddle."

"Another hair?" asked his companion, somewhat viciously.

"I'll be blowed, old man, if you don't stick to a joke longer than any other man I know of, and laugh at it, too, all by yourself. Come, come, where are those things?"

"In the safe, near the cash drawer."

At these words Broome opened the door of the vault and disappeared within. Hooper had lazily strolled to the window and in his interest in watching the slow approach of Albert coming up the street he failed to hear a man enter the office and seat himself in a chair before the half-closed door of the vault. A light cough caused the clerk to turn with a start.

"Excuse me, sir," he hurriedly began, with a glance around the office in search of Broome. "Mr. Adams has

gone out," he explained to the stranger. "So has Broome," he added, under his breath.

"I am sorry, for my business with Mr. Adams is important. Will he return soon?"

"In about half an hour."

"Have you any objection to my remaining here for a short time? I am quite tired out from walking."

"Certainly not, sir," Hooper politely made haste to answer. "Would you like to read the morning paper?" he added, his eyes fastened on the stranger in the vain endeavor to remember where and when he had seen him before.

"Thank you." After a careless glance at the paper he said to Hooper, who was trying to appear—to judge from his rustling of papers at the desk—as if he were a very busy man, "I see there has been found no clue to the person who attempted to rob Mr. Adams."

"It is true the person is yet at large, but a detective is on his track. He will be caught, never you fear."

"Humph! Who is the shrewd detective who has this case in charge?"

"None of your business, Mr. Inquisitive," was Hooper's unspoken reply.

"Whom did you say?"

Hooper cleared his throat in order to choke down his rising choler, before he answered: "One in whom Mr. Adams places implicit confidence. Will you excuse me for a moment, sir?" and Hooper, with an air of great importance, disappeared into the private office.

Quick as a flash, the man softly pushed aside the chair, and gently pulled open the door of the vault.

"Who are you?" quietly asked Mr. Broome, stepping forward and bringing his hand like a vice down upon the intruder's arm.

"Who are you?" was the haughty demand. "What were you doing there?"

"I'll be hanged!" Mr. Broome let fall his hand from the other's arm in pure astonishment.



"I did not open the safe," answered the man, with rising indignation. "It got open by mistake, when I moved my chair. Your presence here is more questionable than mine it would seem," he added, sarcastically. "I am here to see Mr. Adams on business. I am willing to allow, sir, that you came for a similar purpose. Good morning, sir," and he quickly left the room.

At that moment Hooper returned. "Where is he?" he cried.

"Where's who?" asked Mr. Broome.

"That fellow who was waiting for Mr. Adams."

Broome grinned. "He thought Mr. Adams was in the vault, but when he found it was me, he left quite unceremoniously, although I will do him the justice to acknowledge that he said good morning."

"Who the devil was he?" and Hooper looked about the room to see if anything was missing.

"I don't think he was the devil," said Broome, "but I think he's in his pay."

"Let me see, let me see," and Hooper tapped his forehead with his forefinger.

"Well, do you think you can see any better if you punch a hole in your forehead?" asked Broome.

"Can't a man see more with his brain than he can with his eyes?" asked Hooper, with a somewhat contemptuous sniff.

"I'll be blowed, but I think you're right after all. I tried to find them things with my eyes but I couldn't so I'll follow your example and use my brains," and he disappeared again within the vault.

Hooper, with folded arms and bowed head walked up and down the room. At last he shouted:

"I have it!"

"So have I," cried Broome, as he emerged from the vault.

"Found 'em all."

"I know who that fellow was," said Hooper.

"Boring the hole did the business, eh?" asked Broome.

"This is no joking matter," and Hooper's face assumed a stern expression, which was most unusual.

"All right," said Broome. "Who was he?"

"His name is Blumenberg. Did you see him, Broome?"

"Of course I did. He opened the vault door and was trying to come in as I came out."

"What did he do that for?" cried Hooper in amazement.

"I think I'll follow your plan, Hooper," and Broome tapped his forehead with his forefinger.

"Imitation is the sincerest flattery," remarked Hooper.

"I see it all," said Broome. "That damned rascal meant to steal something that was in the vault. What did you say his name was?"

"Blumenberg."

"Well, I'll be blowed! Wasn't I a blooming fool to let him go!"

"And you haven't got even a hair for a clue, Broome," and Hooper, falling into a chair, burst into a immoderate fit of laughter, while the outwitted detective glared at him as though he were the criminal.

"I say, Broome," said Hooper, rising and extending his hand, "let's be friends. Let us work together. That fellow Blumenberg is courting Louise Mowry, who is Minerva's cousin. When I was out there one day Minerva found an envelope addressed to Charles Burton. I think that Blumenberg was the one who dropped it. Now, what's the connection between C. B., Conrad Blumenberg, and C. B., Charles Burton?"

"Why, the envelope, of course," said Broome.

"It's a clue, ain't it?" asked Hooper.

"Why, of course it is," cried Broome, "and by gum, as my old father used to say, we'll stick to it."

## CHAPTER XVI

### ON THE BRIDGE

WHEN Damon and Pythias reached the street door, Damon drew a long breath of relief and said, with his hand laid deprecatingly on his friend's arm:

"I want to get away from here, if only for an hour. Will you go back to the office and tell Mr. Broome I shall be back soon?"

Instead of replying to this hastily uttered request, Pythias doggedly followed Damon out onto the crowded sidewalk and walked along beside him, saying quietly: "On one condition."

"Name it," hastily answered Damon, like one who was willing to pay almost any price for coveted solitude.

"I will go back to the office if you will go home," was the reply.

"Impossible!" was the hurried exclamation. "I have some work to do that must be finished before night."

"The work will be after you when you're dead."

"I could hardly bring it with me," answered Damon, smiling faintly.

"I believe you would bring your law briefs beyond the grave—if you could," was the sarcastic comment.

"Heaven forbid!" came the fervent ejaculation. "They might swamp the boat on the River Styx."

"Don't try to sidetrack my argument with your would-be humorous remarks," cried Pythias.

At that moment they turned into a quiet side street and Pythias suddenly stopped short on the edge of the curbstone and indignantly burst forth:

"Work, work, always work! Are you ever going to have

any play? Who and what are you working for?" he demanded, almost roughly. "Money? You have it in plenty. Fame? Pshaw! Take your eyes off your dry documents—if only for a minute—and look up into the blue of the sky to see what you can discover there. Fame is not always found on learning's road."

"I have also heard that trite phrase before," interposed Damon, with another faint attempt to smile.

"Then it is a pity you did not heed it," was the grim reply.

Damon made a move as if to retrace his steps.

"You are anxious to return to the rut, are you?" vehemently broke forth his companion. "By Jove! It took a fierce shock to send you out of it. For, of course," he added excitedly, "you must acknowledge that for the past few years you have been making a mere machine of yourself."

"I believe I have been making a machine of myself," admitted Damon, slowly, "for lately I have begun to think and act like one."

"If you hadn't wasted so much strength on your work, you might have been better able to resist the shock you got to-day." Then seeing the white, drawn look coming over Damon's face again, Pythias quickly added, with an abrupt change of tone: "it stands to reason that that brute Burton won't find his wife to-night. To-morrow she will be safe with Louise. You go home and take a rest," he pleaded, his hand on Damon's shoulder. "I will go back to the office and tell Mr. Broome to postpone the interview until to-morrow. In the meantime, Hooper can take charge of your work."

"Very well," at last agreed Damon, who was somewhat reassured by his friend's optimism. "But I won't go home. I will take a long, long walk."

With a feeling of depression, Pythias saw his friend slowly round the corner of the neighboring square. But it was with a feeling of elation he turned, a moment later, and hurried back to the office to deliver his hastily trumped up excuse for Damon's sudden and unexpected departure.

Meanwhile, Damon soon made his way to Beacon Street and with bowed head and heavy heart swiftly walked past the long line of elegant brick houses, out towards the suburbs. On, on he walked, out into the quiet green of the country, heeding, seeing nothing; his feelings benumbed, his mind a mere blank. After hours of walking, he retraced his steps, and at dusk he found himself, dusty and footsore, back in the city, almost at the point from where he had started, for, straight as an arrow, he had unconsciously made his way to the house where Ethel lived. In her room showed a cheery light. Thanks be to God for His mercy, she was safe! Damon watched her window until her unmistakable shadow fell across the curtain. Somewhat relieved by this reassuring sight, he slowly wandered down the steep hill towards the river and out upon the neighboring bridge.

A cool, refreshing breeze swept across the broad basin of the Charles. It was growing dark, but the light of the departing day still lingered in the western sky, where remained low on the horizon an amber light that higher up turned to pale green before it merged into the deeper blue of the upper sky. Boston was already engulfed in the black of the approaching night and, from many of the houses that skirted the river's edge, glowed a light here and there. Even when Damon was a boy this bridge had possessed a mysterious attraction. To him there were never more gorgeous sunsets, never fairer moonlight nights than he had witnessed, times without number, from this narrow, wooden bridge for the rays of the departing sun lighted up, and the moon bathed in her tender light, Boston, the city of his birth. Boston, where he had known his earliest joys and sorrows, where were centered many of his interests, where dwelt many of his friends and the woman whom he loved. But to-night the bewitching beauty of this scene, this broad estuary so like Venice in its Boston shore line of stately brick houses, slender spires and tall church towers that were silhouetted against the sky, had no charms for him. Wearily

he leaned against the railing of the bridge, and oblivious alike to chance pedestrians on their homeward way to the neighboring city, or to the crowded cars that rumbled by every few minutes, he gazed lingeringly down as if fascinated at the black, swift running tide.

"If like a pebble," at last he whispered, drearily, "I could drop to the bottom of this river, with nothing beyond a mere splash or a few ripples to note my disappearance, how gladly would I end my existence here to-night. For what is life, after all," he exclaimed bitterly, "but one continuous round of petty details; a little happiness, a great deal of sorrow; then in a day or a year, more or less, we pass out of this world and are forgotten. Oh, what a mockery it all is!" He ground his teeth in impotent rage. "It seems so hard to be good, so easy to be bad. What consolation do I get from being told that we poor, weak mortals have brought upon ourselves this chaotic state of living? To-night I only know that the woman I love is alone—unprotected—and may have need of me, and I—I am powerless to help her."

He pressed his hands fiercely against his face to try and force back the tears that seemed to break from his desolate heart and rush in a torrent to his eyes. At that moment a light laugh floated up from a merry couple in a boat which glided from under the bridge on its way up the river with the tide.

"Are there to be only tears for Ethel and me?" he sadly asked. "If to-night I could stand before her, and with arms outstretched bid her come to me! I would shield her from sorrow; drive away care; then it would not be long before the old color would steal back to her face, the happy light come back to her eyes. I will go to her!" he cried with sudden, savage determination. He turned and walked a few steps before he realized, so engrossed was he with his own thoughts, that a car had come to a halt near the centre of the bridge, while the draw was opened to allow a big, slow-moving vessel to be drawn through by an important,

puffing tug-boat. Some students on the back of the car were singing, now high, now low, a plaintive refrain, which seemed to pass several times from one voice to another before it was taken up in unison:

“My heart doth bear a burden, love,  
And thou hast placed it there,  
And I would wager ev’n my life  
That none doth heavier bear.”

Within the shadow Damon lingered and listened. When the car at last moved on, he slowly, sadly retraced his steps and resumed his old position against the rail.

“It’s no use,” he said, doggedly. “I cannot go to her and perhaps add another and heavier burden to her heart, just to gain my own, selfish end.”

Damon leaned wearily forward and looked almost fearfully at the sullen, rushing tide. Death seemed alluring. He had overcome his weaker self but he was tired of the battle. Suddenly he felt a movement at his feet. Looking down he beheld a crouching little dog, who was gazing up at him.

“Are you, too, alone to-night?”

At this whispered question the dog rose, with wagging tail, and licked the hand that was outstretched to him in friendly greeting.

“Poor lost pup! After all, there is not much difference between animal and man.” He looked upward earnestly into the blue, unfathomable sky, which was sprinkled with a myriad of stars. “But I have a soul,” he added, “which is one day to return to God. And I swear by that soul no harm shall ever come through me to Ethel. Come sir,” he said to his new friend; “come away from this gloomy spot.”

The dog obediently trotted after him, as he made his rapid way across the bridge to Cambridge Street. It was near midnight and this usually busy street was now practi-

cally deserted. Suddenly the dog stopped with a low growl. Damon looked up at the window of a small dwelling house, where could be seen a tiny wreath of smoke curling upward. With a loud cry of "Fire!" he dashed through the half open door and rushed up the dark, narrow stairs, where at the top his way was blocked by a closed door. It was but the work of a moment to crash it inward with a well-directed blow of his powerful shoulder. For a second his way was checked by the thick smoke which immediately rushed out in a volume and enveloped him. He could hear the crackling of flames and above the ominous sound a man's feeble cry for help. Damon dashed through the room to the bed, caught up the slight body in his arms and staggered with it down the stairs. Choking, sputtering, he reached the street and almost fell into the arms of a big, burly policeman; who, with kindly strength, relieved him of his half-insensible burden.

"Sure, it's poor, bed-ridden old man Dennis he's rescued. Those little men do beat the devil for strength," he muttered, with a side look at Damon, who was leaning, half-exhausted against a nearby house. "Be gobs! It's more smoke than fire—a case of busted lamp. I wonder where Dennis' old woman is?" he growled.

Damon never heard the answer to the policeman's question, for just then the fire apparatus came dashing down the street with jar and rumble. During the ensuing excitement Damon slipped unnoticed through the quickly gathering crowd, and, in company with the little dog, walked rapidly down Charles Street. When he at last found himself in his own room, tired, dusty and hungry though he was, he cried with the exultance of a victor:

"How much better thus to save a life than to cowardly take my own."



## CHAPTER XVII

### AT CLOSE QUARTERS

THAT same evening a far different scene was being enacted in Ethel's room. At the time Damon, with weary, longing eyes, saw her shadow fall across the curtain, she, all unconscious of the near presence of her faithful friend, was bending tenderly over her little girl.

"It's long after bedtime," she whispered, gently, closing the book in which the child was deeply engrossed.

Lillie heaved a little fluttering sigh of regret. She was sleepy, but she hated, oh, so much, to leave this wonderful fairy tale unfinished.

"Never mind," whispered her mother, soothingly, as she seated herself in the rocking-chair with the child in her arms, "I will tell you one."

"Is it true?" eagerly asked Lillie, who was already beginning to discriminate between facts and fairies.

"I don't know," laughed Ethel. "It is one my mother used to tell me when I was a little girl."

Lillie snuggled contentedly down against her mother. Was there anything more delightful than to hear what mamma used to do when she was a little girl?

"Once upon a time," began Ethel, "there was a man who was far away from his native land, and he heard an Indian woman singing her little Indian baby to sleep. He did not know what she was singing, for he could not understand her language, but the music was so sweet and soft and low it made him long for his home, which was many, many miles away. He never forgot this plaintive melody and some time after he wrote verses that ever since have been sung to that same tune with which the Indian woman crooned her baby to sleep."

"Mid pleasures and palaces tho' we may roam,  
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home,"  
softly sang Ethel over and over again, until at last her voice  
died away into a whisper.

"Home? Is this ours?" asked her big-eyed listener in  
wonder.

Ethel aroused herself from her reverie. "Yes, dear,"  
she slowly admitted. "Home is where love and content-  
ment dwell," she hastened to explain. "One can often  
have more happiness in one room than in twenty."

"Oh, yes," drowsily assented Lillie, her mind now diverted  
to their one room and its big sunny bow window where she  
could finish in the morning her fairy story.

"Can I ever forget, darling," went on Ethel, half to her-  
self, when a few minutes later she carried the half-sleeping  
child into the adjoining alcove, "how much sunshine your  
sweet presence has brought into my dull life?

Ah, blissful is the tender tie

That binds me, dearest one, to thee,"

she murmured, fondly, as she disrobed the child for the  
night.

"You always could talk well," fell upon Ethel's ear, when  
shortly after she reappeared in the room, her backward  
glance resting yearningly upon the sleeping child in the bed.

With a start of dismay, she turned in the direction of the  
cold, cutting voice and beheld her husband standing before  
the closed door.

"But the trouble with you clever women is," he added,  
with an evil smile at the white-faced woman before him,  
"you talk too much. You certainly don't seem disposed  
to talk much to me this evening," he sarcastically com-  
mented, after waiting a few minutes for her to reply. "Sav-  
ing your brilliancy for others, eh? Why don't you ask me  
to sit down? This is not the way to treat a husband that  
you haven't seen for over a year."

"What are you here for?" at last came her low-voiced  
question.

"Who has a better right?" was the quick reply.

Maddened by her look of intolerable disgust which she made no effort to hide, he added, sharply: "And here I intend to stay."

"No, no!" came the startled protest.

The door is locked and the key is in my pocket," he made haste to say in answer to the quick look she directed towards the door. "Your landlady obligingly let me in—after I told her I was your husband. The time is not far distant, madam," he remarked, as he seated himself comfortably in a chair, "when you begged me on your knees to stay."

"I entreated you to stay with me," she answered, passionately, "because I wanted to do what was right. You were my husband—"

"I am your husband," he blandly corrected.

"And I loved you once—"

"Once?" he jeered.

"Yes, once in the innocent days of my girlhood, when you fascinated me with your gentle ways"—her voice broke—"and fervent words of love. Of course I loved you," she said, simply. "Why should I have married you unless I did? But now"—she pressed her hands upon the table near which she was standing and leaned forward as if to emphasize her words—"I have none left for you. You killed it long ago by your neglect, by your cruelty—"

There was a slight rustle in the alcove.

"Papa, you have come home," was the joyous exclamation. And Ethel turned to see her child standing there in her nightdress, with her tousled hair falling in a shower of gold about her shoulders.

"Yes, I have come home," and over the dark, sullen face of the man swept a look of love that softened the harsh outlines into a semblance of what he might have been under different and happier circumstances. "I have come for you."

"May I go, mamma?" eagerly asked Lillie, to whose

childish imagination this invitation opened up for the evening a vista of unwonted pleasures.

"No," fell from the mother's dry, white lips.

"Candy, dolls," coaxed the father to the child, who was now confidently nestling in his arms.

"Go back to bed, dearie," urged Ethel, her wide open eyes fastened fearfully on the man's coldly smiling face.

The child pouted and clung to her father. She had not seen him for such a long time he must be held and kept. Mamma, with her gentleness and love, always was and always would be. According to her baby ideas, mamma was like the sky, the sun, the air—her whole existence. But papa—he was a novelty, a treat. And without realizing the blow she gave to her mother's fond, loving heart, she cried:

"I want to go with papa."

"You shall go," he answered, rising in triumph; "no one has a better right to you."

"I have."

Burton fell back before the steely look in the woman's eyes; but the child he held fast in his arms.

"She is mine by every right. From the hour of her birth I have nursed, cherished and protected her. She is mine. Let him who dares take her from me. Lillie," her voice changed to a soft command, "go back to bed for mamma."

The father's arms tightened about the child.

"Lillie, come to me."

At this gentle entreaty the child slipped like a flash through her father's arms and ran to kiss the dear lips that never in all her short life had uttered one unkind word.

Ethel quickly bore the penitent child back to bed and with a forgiving kiss bade her go to sleep.

"Will papa be here when I wake up?" asked Lillie, wistfully.

"Yes, I'll be here in the morning," called out Burton, before Ethel had time to make a reply.

"As I said before," he nonchalantly remarked, as Ethel, pale and quiet, once more appeared in the room, "you have

the gift of gab—even with your own child. Talk is cheap, however,” he added with a sudden change of tone. “Who told you that you had a first right to her?” he demanded, savagely. “Your paramour, Mr. Adams?”

“My paramour?” Ethel looked him full in the face, with cold contemptuous eyes, then lapsed into silence. There are some remarks too outrageous to call forth even a denial.

“Gad, Ethel, but you’re a handsome woman!”

He drew closer to her in unfeigned admiration and grasped her hands in a sudden, warm embrace. She tore her hands free and quickly put between herself and him the width of the table, where she stood vainly striving to hide her terror at this totally unexpected amorous turn to the interview.

“My touch contaminates you, does it, my proud beauty?”

She was not afraid of his bullying; she knew she was a match for him where Lillie was concerned; but his caresses, which she knew from past, bitter experiences were impelled by passion only, were obnoxious to her, and she showed it plainly by an almost imperceptible shudder which she felt was not lost upon him by his repeating the question with rising vehemence.

Before she had time to form a conciliatory reply, a loud peal of thunder smote upon the air and the storm that had been gathering burst with sudden fury against the side of the house. Ethel hurried to the bow window, but before she succeeded in closing it the driving rain had beaten in and drenched a part of the lace curtains. Was it possible, she asked herself, that she must spend the remainder of the night trying to ward off the passionate advances of this man whom once she was glad to call her husband? With blanching face she bent over, in order to give herself time to think, and pretended to straighten out the wet curtain ends with hands that trembled in spite of her efforts to control herself.

Her husband, who stood regarding her with narrowed, suspicious eyes, at last broke forth, with rage that could no longer be suppressed:

"Getting ready, my virtuous beauty, to marry someone else?"

Ethel straightened up in proud indignation, her hands catching at the curtain behind her with an unconscious, spasmodic grasp. "My first marriage has not been productive of so much happiness that I wish to essay a second," came her passionate protest.

"Oh, I'm not so sure of that," he sneered, his watchful eyes upon her as if enjoying his power to sting her to sudden anger. "To-morrow you leave here for Mrs. Mowry's. Don't start—you can't deny it." He sat down in a chair and carelessly crossed one leg over the other before he added: "Mr. Adams spends most of his leisure time there. I forbid you to go."

The woman before him tossed her head in disdain at this presumptuous command. "You—you forbid me to go?"

"Yes," was the calm reply, "and what's more, I forbid you to take further action towards a divorce from me."

"I will do as I please," came the defiant answer to this demand.

He took a pistol from his pocket and fingered it significantly.

"You coward! I am not afraid of you!" As if to prove the truth of her statement, she came out of the bow window and advanced towards him.

"Indeed, madam," he answered, grimly. "I know you're not. This pistol is not meant for you."

Ethel sank in sudden helplessness into a chair. The air of the room was hot and stifling. For one moment she wished merciful unconsciousness would sweep over her. She closed her eyes, only to have the raging fury of the storm strike more acutely upon her senses. It was past midnight and inside the house not a sound broke the stillness of the hour save the regular breathing of Lillie, whom their suppressed, low-toned conversation had not disturbed from her slumber. Ethel dared not call for help; this cold, brutal man was capable of shooting the first person who attempted

to come to her assistance. She felt that she was trapped, beaten. There was no help for it, she must accede to his demand.

"I promise," at last she faltered.

"I knew you would."

Her eyes flashed at this boast. "On one condition," she quickly stipulated, "that you leave this house at once."

"Don't be in such a hurry to get rid of me," he expostulated, as she moved towards the door in anticipation of his departure. "There is just one thing more."

She paused and listened apprehensively.

"I want you to go into court and swear you know a young man in New Orleans named Pythias Prince, son of Richard Prince; that is all."

"That is all?" she repeated. "To bear false witness?" she questioned, blankly, as if doubting the evidence of her hearing.

"Well, what of it? That will be easy," he answered, cheerfully.

"Easy!" she cried, "to injure the real Pythias Prince; to blast the life of my dearest friend, Louise Mowry—my old schoolmate, whose hospitality I am about to accept?"

"Was going to accept," he prompted. "So she is an old schoolmate of yours, is she? Well, don't ever allow a petty sentiment to stand in your way."

Ethel clasped her hands in despair at the utter futility of trying to make this man understand her ideas of right and wrong.

"Hark, you, Ethel," he continued. "I am in a poor mood to be trifled with. Time is precious; I have other business to attend to. Unless you write and sign such a paper as I shall dictate to you, the child goes with me to-night."

Slowly the weary woman moved to her writing-desk and sat down before it.

"Write," he commanded as he thrust a pen into her hand and pushed some paper on the desk before her: "I, Ethel

Burton, wife of Charles Burton, do hereby promise on my word as a pure and honest woman, and of my own free will and accord, that I will perform the following acts. If I do not, I will, and do hereby agree to give up the custody of my daughter Lillie to him. Now sign."

"What are the acts?" asked she in a voice hardly above a whisper.

"Shrewd as ever. Well, write: I will postpone my application for divorce and my departure for Mrs. Mowry's until his lawsuit with Damon Adams is ended, and I will aid him as he may direct in said case." The man's eyes glittered. "Now sign."

Ethel rose to her feet and flung the pen from her with a gesture of defiance. "I will not."

At this sudden termination of his smoothly running scheme, Burton leaped toward the alcove in a fury. Like a tigress, Ethel sprang upon him and with both hands clutched him by the arm in her endeavor to drag him back.

"Do you wish me to kill you?" he hoarsely cried, his face demonical with rage as he vainly tried to shake her off.

"Yes," panted the woman, to whom life would be nothing without her child.

"Then take that," he cried, raising his clenched fist to strike her upturned face.

"Not so fast!" Simultaneously with this cry came the crash of splintered wood, and through a door connecting the next room sprang a young man.

"Who are you?" angrily demanded Burton, with quickly lowered fist. "What right have you in this room?"

"As much right as you have to tamper with my name."

"Pythias Prince!" broke from Ethel in wonderment.

"Thank God! Oh," she cried in terror, as Burton made a quick move towards his pistol on the table.

"Stand where you are." Like a flash Pythias, at Ethel's warning cry, had raised one hand and levelled a pistol at Burton. "Two can play at that game. "Yes," he went on



to explain to Ethel, without removing his eyes from the man before him, "I am Pythias Prince. When I moved in here this afternoon, I little knew who was my next door neighbor. A few minutes ago I heard my name mentioned and could not refrain from listening. When this brute threatened to kill you, I thought it about time to interfere. Now, you unlock that door."

With a snarl like that of a wild beast brought to bay, Burton did as he was told.

Pythias followed him out into the hall. "Go down these stairs before I kick you down. Dog that you are, shooting is too good for you."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE FORTUNE-TELLER.

THE next day dawned bright and clear, with no trace of the previous night's storm save in the cleaner, greener aspect of nature; an aspect so dustless that little Lillie upon beholding it decided with a wise shake of her head that all the leaves and the grass must have been washed.

On the smoothly shaven lawn at Mrs. Mowry's that afternoon, sat Louise and Minerva awaiting the expected visit of the fortune-teller.

"Not that I really believe in fortunes," protested Louise, her needle flying in and out of the piece of cambric in her hands. Nevertheless, despite her efforts to appear indifferent, her gaze would wander every now and then, towards the gravel walk that led up from the entrance to the grounds.

"But it's such fun to know whether you're going to marry a dark or light man," spoke up Minerva from her seat on the grass where, with her hands clasped across her knees, she swayed from side to side in serene idleness, "and if you are going to get your wish and what you least expect—and—and all that sort of thing," explained the girl, with a nervous little laugh of pleased anticipation. "Oh! Here she is!"

In the tall, gaunt figure coming towards them across the lawn, Louise, to her surprise, recognized the woman who had so strangely accosted her near the summer house, a few days before.

"You look tired," she said, when the woman drew near. "Pray be seated; it's a long, hot walk from the depot. Minnie, will you go up to the house and bring some tea?"

The fortune-teller heaved a grateful sigh as she took the proffered chair in the shade of the big elm tree. "You

have a good heart, dearie—too good a heart," she added, quickly, her gaze fastened earnestly upon Louise, "to be overcast by the black, black shadows I see around you."

Louise shuddered at the woman's mournful tone, and her face fell in spite of her efforts to look cheerful.

"Never mind, never mind," was the whispered consolation, "you will come out all right. Your heart is a good pilot; it will steer you through the troubled waters, straight to a harbor of rest."

"How about my future?" eagerly broke in Minerva, who hurried up at that moment with the tea tray and a large plate of delicious looking slices of bread and butter, which she briskly placed on the little table beside her cousin.

The woman refused to eat, but she thirstily drank the tea which Louise poured for her, and thoughtfully studied the bottom of the cup before she said to the waiting Minerva:

"Your future? You have no future—or no past. You will always live in the present." At the rueful face which Minerva made up at what she considered a meagre bit of information, the fortune-teller drew from her pocket a dingy pack of cards and commanded the girl to shuffle and cut. The woman took the cards which Minerva deftly cut into three packs and carefully studied the first pile.

"I see a light man—"

The blushing Minerva giggled.

—"who has a good heart for you. You had better choose him," she advised, as she studied the second pack. "He will bring you money."

Minerva shook her head incredulously at the thought of Hooper in the guise of a rich man.

"Perhaps he will be the means of your getting money, for I see it all around you and him. You will surely get money, and within a three," insisted the speaker.

"And my wish?" returned the expectant girl.

"Didn't I tell you the light man has a good heart for you?"

At this unexpected betrayal of her thoughts, the pink in Minerva's cheeks deepened to a red, as she cast a sheepish

look at Louise, who laughed and returned her a knowing little nod of sympathy.

"Yours next," said the woman.

"No," cried Louise, with paling face. "I think I would rather not."

"Why, Louise," responded her cousin, "you've changed your mind."

"'Tis a woman's privilege," quoth the fortune-teller before Minerva could make further protest. "What falls to the floor comes to the door," she quickly added, as she stooped to pick up a card which had fallen from the pack she had been unconsciously shuffling. "Ah! A dark man!"

"He was here this morning," volunteered Minerva, who was casting a roguish look at the blushing Louise.

"You have no cause to fear the future," declared the fortune-teller. "You will be a happy woman. And you," she added, smiling indulgently into Minerva's bright face, "you will be a successful woman. Ah!" The quick cry she gave was low and full of surprise. "Here comes one who has known much sorrow."

The two girls followed the direction of her strained look and saw the tall figure of Ethel, who, with bowed head and hands that were loosely clasped before her, moved slowly across the farther end of the lawn and out the back gate into the quiet of the adjoining field.

"The pity of it, and she so young!" The woman's voice sank almost to a wail.

"Think of it—he would have murdered her," indignantly burst forth Minerva, who, in her anxiety for Ethel, seemed to have forgotten the existence of her companions.

"Murder, did you say?" The woman sprang to her feet and the cup in her lap fell to the ground with a crash.

With a warning look for Minerva to be silent, Louise started forward and laid a reassuring hand on the woman's arm. "Poor creature, the heat has been too much for you," she murmured, one arm thrown around the bowed shoulders

of the woman who had nervously collapsed into her seat and covered her face with her trembling hands in a vain endeavor to stifle the low moans which escaped her.

"Oh, the silver! We have not yet crossed your palm with it," exclaimed the frightened Minerva, in the hope of diverting the woman's mind.

"No, no," she muttered, pushing aside the offered coin. With a sudden effort she started up. "I must be moving."

Despite Louise's efforts to detain her in the cool shade of the tree, she left them with a faintly uttered: "Good luck go with you, my lassies."

Down by the gate where she paused for breath within the shade of the lilac bushes, she beheld a bright-haired little girl busily converting a heap of freshly picked wild flowers into a big, gaily-hued bouquet.

"What is your name, child?" came the quick, tremulous demand.

"Lillie Burton."

The woman sank upon her knees in the grass beside the child and gazed long and earnestly into her face. "So you are Lillie?" at last she whispered.

Lillie nodded as a matter of course and proceeded to select a few more flowers from the mass of blossoms beside her.

"Who are you?" at last she shyly asked, with a wondering look at the thin, black-robed woman who was twining and untwining one of her long curls about her lean, brown fingers.

"I am a wanderer on the face of the earth," was the grim reply.

"A Gypsy!" Lillie let fall her bouquet in half fearful delight. "Do you live in a tent?"

"I have no home."

"Not even one room where love dwells and where one can be as happy as in six?"

Her listener gave utterance to a short, bitter laugh, then shook her head in sorrowful dissent.

The child with a quick movement of compassion picked up her bouquet and put it into the woman's hand.

"Child, how came you here?" she questioned, abruptly.

"A man brought mamma and me here early this morning. Not papa," was the regretful explanation, he went away last night before I woke up, after mamma had sung me to sleep with 'Home Sweet Home.'"

"Oh, home, home! Shall I ever see one again?" burst from the woman in a heart-rending sob which was checked in her throat by the flutter of a skirt that could be seen through a gap in the opposite hedge that separated the adjoining lane from the main road. The woman hurriedly took the face of the amazed child between her hands and kissed her mouth, forehead, and each cheek, then, rising to her feet, she hastened away from the slowly moving figure behind the hedge. The next moment the fugitive beheld hastening up the road the man who had paid her, and liberally, to go up and tell the fortunes at the big house she had just left. From behind the shelter of a tree she watched him suddenly enter the lane at a point farther down the road. She gazed long enough to see him advance with rapid strides to overtake the slowly moving figure and to see him crush her two hands to his breast.

With his cry, "Thank God, Ethel, you are safe!" ringing in her ears, the fortune-teller, a smile of triumphant elation lighting up her face, passed down the road, the child's bouquet pressed close to her heart.

## CHAPTER XIX

### "VENGEANCE IS MINE!"

SWIFTLY down the road to the railroad station went the woman, the same triumphant smile on her face; a smile that lingered long after the train had left Riverdale far behind. When she arrived in Boston, however, upon her face had settled a look of determination which gave way to one of terror when she lurched forward upon the platform in sudden dizziness. Steadying herself for a moment against the car, she slowly made her way out into the ladies' waiting-room, and tottered into a seat where, her head falling limply forward upon the bouquet in her hands, she at once fell into a fitful doze. A knot of people soon gathered, in eager curiosity, in front of the swaying figure.

"Someone ought to call a policeman," promptly suggested a spare, thin visaged woman, in black, who expressed her severe disapproval of the whole scene by giving the two giggling girls beside her a look of timely warning against the pitfalls which beset the path of the dissipated—and the frivolous.

An immaculately clothed fat little gentleman, who had been eying these girls in ill-concealed admiration, took the occasion to remark, in well-bred contempt, that the woman was drunk.

"She is ill," was the indignant protest of a young man who had just pressed his way to the front of the quickly gathering crowd. "Stand back and give her air."

At his sharp command the crowd obediently parted, and Pythias Prince, after gently arousing the woman from her lethargy, led her from the room, across the brightly lighted rotunda, with its crowd of incoming and outgoing travelers, to a little side door, and out into the quiet street beyond.

"You are weak because you are hungry," he declared in tones that brooked no contradiction.

"I have not eaten a mouthful to-day," admitted his companion, faintly.

"Humph! Then you will get nothing but an egg phosphate for the present," said Pythias under his breath.

When they issued from the drug store on the corner, Pythias suggested that they should cross over and rest awhile in the Public Garden, to which the woman mechanically consented. Evening was beginning to settle over this lovely tranquil spot and here and there a light gleamed through the trees, which only served to deepen their shadows to a softer gloom. Through these shaded paths, Pythias and his strange companion wended their slow way, conscious of, but unheeding the fragrant invitation of the bordering flowers, to linger in their presence. They turned down a path towards the miniature lake near the centre of the garden, and seated themselves on a secluded bench, beneath a weeping-willow tree which swung its green, trailing branches out across the placid surface of the water. Busy swan-boats plied their way up and down the lake and on the opposite shore, a small boy diligently tossed a stick of wood into the water, while a small dog as diligently brought it back again.

After awhile, the woman turned, and looked curiously at her taciturn companion.

"You are a good man," at last she said.

"I am a doctor," he answered, simply. "I want to help the sick."

She raised one hand to her heart, as if in pain. "My trouble is here," came hopelessly from her lips. "You seek to save people from death?" she asked in rising anger. "Don't you know the world would be better if some people were out of it?"

"Who, for instance?" questioned her listener, dryly.

"The wicked."

"We all—both good and bad—die soon enough, and



many—too many, before their time,” was the sententious reply.

“Ha, ha, so you love life?” chuckled the woman. “Well, you are young—too young to have felt it’s sting. And you are good,” she added with a wise shake of her head. “The world should be rid only of the wicked,” she whispered over and over, as if she loved the word. “I met people like you to-day” she continued after awhile. “They were young and happy—at Riverdale.”

“Riverdale did you say?” broke in Pythias in surprise.

“I told fortunes there to-day.”

“Oh!”

“Fortune-telling is silly business, eh?” With which mocking question she shook the pocket in her skirt.

Her listener started at the jingle of the coin, and his face grew dark. “Pray why didn’t you spend some of your easily-earned money for food?”

“It would choke me,” was the weary response. “I was too full of tears.” Again her hand went convulsively to her heart. “The dear lady at Riverdale, with the mild blue eyes, and heavy golden hair, offered me bread. She didn’t want her fortune told.”

“Why,”—he hesitated as if ashamed of his childish curiosity, “was she afraid?”

“That gentle dove has no need to fear the future,” spoke up the woman hotly. “A dark, quiet man will take care of her.”


“That he will,” was the fervent response.”

She turned and gave the man at her side a sudden look of comprehension. “You are he.”

He nodded in proud assent.

“You will take care—good care of her future, just as I will take good care of another’s future. I’ll wipe it out. I’ll wipe it out,” and she made a downward movement with her faded bouquet as if drawing a wet sponge across a slate.

“Woman, you cannot wipe anyone out of existence,” sharply warned the startled man.



"Not even if he has basely wronged me and mine?"

"Not even if he has wronged you and yours," was the firm reply.

"I can and I will!" The grinding of her feet into the gravel walk bore testimony to her determination.

Pythias laid a quieting hand on her arm. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay."

"True," was the exultant assent, "and I will be the instrument of Fate."

Pythias looked in despair at this half-demented creature, and asked himself who she was, and where did she belong? No doubt her talk was but the outpouring of a half-diseased mind, he argued to himself, when suddenly she smiled with horrible meaning and said: "Suppose this man means harm to you and yours?"

"What!" He faced her in quick suspicion.

"Oh, ho," shrilly jeered his tormentor—"quite a different story when it touches your interests—the fair lady with the eyes of blue."

"What do you mean?" Down came his hand on hers like a vice.

"Let me go!" she demanded sullenly, "or I'll tell you nothing."

His grasp slowly relaxed, while beads of perspiration stood out on his brow, as he waited for the woman to speak. Instead of complying, she stooped and picked up the battered bouquet, which he had unconsciously, but ruthlessly, swept from her hand, and in stormy silence, she began to straighten out the crumpled petals.

At last, Pythias's low, strained voice, broke the silence. "There is only one man who would do us harm."

"It is he—Charles Burton!"

Her listener started up in mad passion.

"And I'm going to kill him!" came the triumphant exclamation.

Pythias plunged down into the shadows of the deserted path to hide from the fortune-teller's watchful eyes the evil

desire that sprung into being at her threat. He longed to kill this man as he would kill any other poisonous reptile, that infested his path. What foul act this Burton was now premeditating, was beyond Pythias' comprehension; but he felt sure that this scoundrel, who had ruined Damon's peace of mind, made an attempt on Ethel's life, and blighted in some mysterious way, the fortune-teller's existence, was capable of the basest crime. That he now threatened harm to Louise, was now more than her lover could endure. He drew his hands together, as if Burton's throat was locked between them, and his breath was being choked out of him. Yes, he would be glad, glad, glad to see this man wiped out of existence.

Then Pythias stopped short in his walk, and his laugh was loud and bitter, as he turned to ask the woman, what right he or she had to dispose of even that mean creature's life. But when he reached the bench, she was gone.

Blaming himself bitterly for allowing her to escape, perhaps to put her threat into execution, along the path he went in quick pursuit. To a policeman who followed suspiciously after him, Pythias stopped and explained matters.

"I saw just such a woman pass up this path not ten minutes ago. She was with a small boy and a yaller dog."

The look of incredulity faded from Pythias' face for there in the path before him lay a few withered trampled blossoms that had fallen from the fortune-teller's bouquet.

## CHAPTER XX

### A WALK IN THE WOODS

THE caress that the fortune-teller had witnessed with so much triumph was but a short one, for scarcely had Damon clasped Ethel's hands to his heart in thanksgiving, when their hands fell apart and with one accord he and she turned and walked along the lane. Towards the woods they went; he with dejectedly bowed head, and she with hers thrown back, a fearful look in her wide-open eyes. In silence thus they walked for a couple of miles, until at last when they reached the heart of the silent woods, he suddenly stopped and said:

"You must rest."

"I must walk, walk," she protested, nervously.

He drew her down beside him onto a large, flat rock, near the side of the road. "You must rest," he gently insisted. "Are you never weary?" he questioned in troubled tones, his mind on her terrible experience of the night before.

"Only here," she answered, with a queer little gesture towards her heart. Then, unconsciously, she drew her hand across her forehead, as if her head, too, was tired. At the look of pain which crossed his face, she added, contritely: "What trouble I have caused you."

Before the anxious eyes that were raised to his face, his own eyes fell, lest she might guess how much she had troubled him.

"I know I have," she repeated, with mournful conviction. "I have always caused trouble. I was born with a turbulent spirit, that has caused me even more trouble than it did others," she hastened to explain, in her desire to right herself in his eyes. "From the time I was a child I was in revolt against deceit, against falsehood. I believed in the ten

commandments and all they meant, and I objected strenuously when one was broken."

"Child, child," he expostulated. "Some of us break all of them."

"Yes, yes, I understand," she replied, to his would-be consolation, "but I have always been so impatient, particularly with myself. But was I to blame," she pleaded, "that turbulence was as much a part of me as were, for instance, my eyes? They are grey; I could not change them if I would."

Looking into their troubled depths, he saw back of their veiled anguish the light of honesty shining forth. "Change them!" he cried, in quick protest.

"No more," she added, with a shake of her head, "than I could change my disposition. I might subdue my disposition, but to kill it would be to kill myself."

"Hush! Hush!" he whispered, imprisoning her hand in his attempt to check her vehemence. He looked curiously at it as it lay long and white in his, and pressing it as tenderly as if it were a wounded bird, he held it while she went on in rapid voice, as if anxious for him to understand.

"Why did you not train your mind? you will ask. Train it?" she repeated, bitterly. "As well train a tiger which you know may turn and rend you at some unexpected moment."

"If this dissatisfied spirit was your heritage, why resent it?" he asked, slowly.

"Because I was born also with high ideals, which I tried to live up to."

"Can any of us do more?" came the quiet remark.

"But it has been such hard work," she cried, despairingly, "and I have accomplished so little."

"Do you call supporting yourself and child nothing?"

"If I had been what I ought, there would have been no necessity for that."

"It isn't possible," asked Damon, in amazement, "that you think your being different would have changed that"—

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he paused and added with an effort—"your husband. You were too conscientious. As for him, I don't believe he knows what a conscience is," blazed forth Damon.

"I always expected too much from him," she faltered.

"That was consistent. You have practically admitted that you always expected too much from yourself."

"Perhaps you are right," she consented, thoughtfully, her mind somewhat calmed by his logic. "I was never mean," she continued, in self-justification, "and I tried so hard at first; afterwards—" A world of hopelessness was in the pause that followed.

"The battle was too much?" he asked, finally.

The pity in his voice unnerved her. "Yes, with—him," she answered, in a trembling voice that could not be controlled. She paused, then after a few minutes added with quivering lips: "I am a beaten soldier."

At this remark a steely light leaped to Damon's eyes and his mouth tightened grimly. Then, realizing that her words held no double meaning, he gravely replied: "Some of the bravest soldiers have suffered defeat."

"When I first met him," she continued, with apparent irrelevance, "I was charmed with his dignity. I lived to find," she continued, sadly, "that it was but a cloak; under his smiling calm was a well of selfishness and cruelty."

While they were talking the evening shades had closed in about them. Ethel had drawn her hand away and was aimlessly poking the dead leaves at her feet with a long, thin stick which she had picked up from among some fallen branches, when suddenly from out the leaves glided a long, black snake. With a low, indrawn gasp of terror, Ethel sprang to her feet. Damon grabbed her fallen switch and bounded across the road after the fast disappearing reptile, which he quickly despatched with a couple of sharp, well directed blows on its head. In well merited pride he turned to find Ethel an inert heap on the rock.

"Why," he ejaculated, hurrying towards her, "what a strange contradiction you are. You bravely face a loaded

pistol in the hands of an infuriated man, and go all to pieces at the sight of a harmless snake."

His words only served to increase her trepidation. "I had rather face ten pistols than one snake." Which remark was followed by a peal of laughter from Damon, whereupon Ethel burst into tears.

"Don't!" begged the contrite man, bending soothingly over her, until the curls on her brow brushed against his cheek. "I never dreamed it would so upset you. Ethel—" The name that had been so much in his thoughts of late dropped unconsciously from his lips. "Ethel," he entreated, as with a firm grasp he drew her hands from her eyes. At sight of the white, tear-stained face of the woman he loved, he dropped down beside her, and with one sweep of his arm, drew her protectingly towards him. Hungrily his other arm went out, and she was clasped close to his heart. At the soft, clinging pressure of her unresisting body, a sort of madness danced through his veins, consuming all cold resolves, and bending his head, he rained kiss after kiss on her cheeks, eyes and mouth.

Then Ethel arose and stood before him, tall and beautiful in the dusk, and he beheld again the fearful look that had come into her eyes when in the lane he had pressed her hand to his madly beating heart.

"Good-bye," she said.

He rose to return to the house. "To-morrow—"


"There will be no to-morrow."

Her voice chilled his exultant tones. He gazed at her dumbly for some minutes before the full import of her words swept over him, then, pale and determined, he advanced towards her. "You are mine! I claim you by right of love!"

"For you and me there will be no to-morrow," she declared, solemnly.

"You are right. For you and me it will always be the present—days replete with the happiness you deserve."

She waved him back with gentle firmness. "Such happiness was never meant for me."



He held out both hands to her. "Come to me," he entreated.

The mingled love and pity in his voice caused her to tremble and close her eyes. In that moment of indecision his arms closed about her and she was once more locked to his heart. At her earnest whispered entreaty he released her.

"I am going back—"

"To him?" The dull amazement in his voice made her hold out her hands in mute appeal.

"Yesterday—how long ago it seems,—" she murmured, faintly, "I felt that it was better to part from him. "To-day —" her voice grew stronger—"I know that it is best for me to return and bear my lot in patience."

"To wait in patience until he murders you?" burst from the man's drawn lips. "You will not always have a Pythias Prince to defend you. Oh, Ethel—"

"Hush!" It was now her turn to calm him. "I am not afraid of him; I never was afraid of anyone but myself. What right have I," she hurriedly went on, "with my high ideals, my love of truth, my hatred of injustice, what right have I to turn my back on the cross—heavy though it be—I ought to bear? Shall I be a coward to flee from the misery and pain that belong to me, for the peace and happiness that I cannot rightfully call my own?"

He stood regarding her with eyes, the misery in which matched the fearfulness of hers.

"You will not let me forget that my child's happiness is more to me than my own," she pleaded. "Her father loves her and she"—her voice broke into a sob—"loves him. It is best that I should return because of that—if for no other reason."

He stood as if turned to stone. The wild fever that, but a short time before, had wiped out prudence, overthrown all good resolves, was now consumed by the strength of her earnest words.

"Is it not best," she continued, still pleadingly, "to turn back, even at the eleventh hour?"



She moved away from him, but impelled by the despair in his ashen face she came back and stood before him with arms outstretched.

"Will it be any comfort for you," she whispered, "to know that you have my heart?"

Before her look of renunciation his own proud spirit of bitter rebellion was laid low. In silence his hands met hers and he raised them to his aching heart in one long clasp, for he knew that it was good-bye forever.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A LETTER FROM THE BARON

THE evening had fallen unnoticed, too, by Mrs. Mowry. Soon after dinner, when her household duties were finished she had disappeared, as was her usual afternoon custom, within the quiet sitting-room. Seating herself in a big arm-chair by the window, she diligently began to cull the news from her favorite papers. Many people read their daily paper; some merely glanced at it; Mrs. Mowry studied hers. Beginning at the first page, with its entrancing headlines, she systematically made her way up and down the columns of each succeeding page, until not even one small want advertisement had escaped her eagle eyes. She often said she would rather go without her meals than go without her paper. In fact, the newspaper habit was Mrs. Mowry's one dissipation, and as a dissipation of any kind is apt to creep insidiously upon, and eventually overcome its unsuspecting victim, so Mrs. Mowry's one dissipation now held her in an iron clasp. Slowly but surely she had become a victim to the "High Life" column. She sighed, nay she aimed to become a leader of society, and her hope of the fulfillment of this desire lay in her daughter, Louise.

This day's paper contained a glowing account of a nobleman allying himself to an American girl of great wealth and beauty.

"It is true that Louise has no fortune," mused Mrs. Mowry, in rapturous contemplation of the column, "but she has beauty—real beauty—not Ethel's kind, at whom a man invariably looks twice to see where her attraction lies."

Then Mrs. Mowry's thoughts naturally wandered to Mr. Blumenberg and to the day when she and Louise would

reign in a small kingdom of their own. For her daughter's fiancé was a nobleman. One day in a burst of confidence he had told her his family history. A sad story it was, of harsh words with a high-tempered, unyielding parent, who had turned him from the door. But eventually Mr. Blumenberg would come into his own, and in the dusk Mrs. Mowry, the paper lying in her lap, continued to dream of the stately halls of Mr. Blumenberg's future home, where she as Grand Dame and Louise as Lady Bountiful, would, some day reign supreme.

She heard Louise's light footsteps upon the stairs, and little Lillie's eager voice, and still she continued to dream in the twilight until her reverie was broken by the sudden entrance of Minerva, who, as she lighted the gas, gave a low cry of surprise when the flood of light disclosed her aunt sitting alone at the window.

"Where are the folks?" asked Minerva.

"Louise is putting Lillie to bed, and Ethel has not yet returned from her walk. She should not stay out so late when she is alone. Where were you?" questioned the elder lady in sudden suspicion.

Minerva triumphantly held out a letter.

"You have been down to the Post Office again? Why don't you live there?"

The letter was lightly dropped into Mrs. Mowry's hand.

"It's for you. I wonder who it's from," added Minerva, eagerly bending over her aunt's shoulder.

That lady stopped scrutinizing the superscription long enough to remark, severely: "If you were as anxious about my work as you are about my affairs, you might accomplish something in time."

To judge from the complacent way in which Minerva turned and surveyed her trim figure in the long cheval glass, she must have been satisfied with her latest handiwork, for her new gown, a white-sprigged pink muslin was a bewildering mass of ruffles, that reached nearly to her waist, where it was belted in with a black velvet ribbon, which hung down

the back of her dress in two long streamers that were coquettishly caught at the ends with bunches of pink rosebuds.

"For all the world like a French dancer," wrathfully declared Mrs. Mowry, who had just caught sight of this floral decoration. "You look like a circus horse, done up in such trappings."

As Minerva, at this rebuke, demurely seated herself at the table and drew from under it a large work-basket, in which lay a half-completed silk waist of Mrs. Mowry's, that lady suddenly stifled another sarcastic remark and proceeded to open her letter in half-molified silence. Minerva tried the effect of a pale blue silk band against the black and white background of the waist, then threw it aside as an utterly unworthy combination, before she casually remarked:

"Mr. Blumenberg has not been here for some time."

"This letter is from him."

The girl leaned apprehensively forward at the peculiar intonation of her aunt's voice.

"He says," she continued, almost inaudibly, "that he has lost a large part of his fortune—"

"Fortune!" mocked Minerva, the irrepressible.

"And he releases Louise from her engagement—"

"Oh, goody, goody." Louise's confidant clapped her hands with uncomplimentary eagerness. But as this was one of the few times Mrs. Mowry did not have her ear-trumpet in the proper place, this remark was allowed to pass unchallenged.

"And he says that he will not see her again until I write and tell him that I esteem him none the less because he is poor."

The letter fluttered to the carpet, as Mrs. Mowry looked hopelessly about the room. Then her head sank on her breast, and an old, withered look seemed to settle over her face. "Must I struggle on here all my life?" she whispered, brokenly

"Oh, Auntie," protested her listener, "why care about that horrid man, with his mouldy old tales of castles and barons?"

"He can never lose his title," thought Mrs. Mowry, with some elation. "He apologized so prettily," she added, "for fear I might think he had an eye on my money."

"Your money?" asked her niece, in genuine surprise.

"My money," affirmed her aunt. "If you wish to succeed in life, never let people know you are poor."

This warning was lost upon Minerva, who, at the sudden sound of familiar voices in the hall, sprang to the door to welcome her Aunt Jane and Uncle Jim.

"You have come to spend Sunday with us," she cried, as she gleefully tried to hug both visitors at once.

"Yes," answered Uncle Jim, with a kindly wink and smile at Mrs. Mowry. "Jane has come to see Mr. Brown, not you."

"Don't be silly, James," exclaimed his wife, dropping into the nearest chair, to allow Minerva to untie her bonnet strings. "Although I did say that that man did me more good the last time I heard him preach. What are you laughing about, James? You always said you liked to hear him preach."

"Yes, yes," heartily agreed her husband, "I'd rather hear him preach one half hour than to hear some people ten minutes."

"If you mean me, James Kent," retorted his wife, with some asperity, "I don't know as you are so precious smart yourself." Turning indignantly to Mrs. Mowry, she asked: "Did you hear about the fuss he got me into at Mr. Adams' office?"

"The one you got me into, you mean," was the quick rejoinder.

"It's no such thing. Your obstinacy—"

"Coupled with your advice—"

"If it was as weak as your knees—" The little lady's eyes rolled heavenward as if human sympathy was not enough to sustain her. "Why, from the time we were first married—"

"Now, Jane," implored her husband, who dreaded a

repetition of the oft repeated tale of his marital shortcomings, "be calm."

"Practise what you preach."

"Madam," began James, his temper failing him, at this psychological moment, "if it had not been for your gold specs—"

"It's too bad I'm taunted with wearing glasses in my old age," whimpered Jane.

"What nonsense are you two talking about?" suddenly broke in Mrs. Mowry, from her seat at the table, where she had fallen into a brown study after greeting her guests.

Uncle Jim, wise man that he was, took this occasion to slip from the room.

"We were talking about the detective at Mr. Adams' office," explained Jane. "Those steam cars always make James feel cross," went on the conscience-stricken woman, in excuse for her husband's ignominious retreat.

"Well, I'm sure of one thing," Mrs. Mowry hastened to remark, her eyes severely levelled upon her niece, "that young lady won't be allowed to go to Boston again in a hurry."

Poor Minerva, at this unexpected attack, blankly let fall Aunt Jane's bonnet.

"That child is all right," warmly interposed the little woman.

Minerva stooped to pick up the bonnet, but because her eyes were blinded with tears she stepped into it.

"There, can't you see for yourself?" cried Mrs. Mowry, with an unwonted bitterness, which was caused more by the disappointment of the letter than any act of Minerva's. "She's more trouble than she's worth." As if to confirm her words, Mrs. Mowry pointed the finger of scorn at the girl's dangling ribbons and their bunches of roses.

Minerva, with head dropped low to hide the tears that fell thick and fast from her face to her dress, passed quickly from the room.

Before Aunt Jane's kindly arms could detain her, Uncle Jim hurriedly entered the room.

"Good gracious! You haven't run away?"

"I have left my aunt's," haughtily corrected Minerva.

For the moment Hooper was made speechless by this appalling mutiny.

"I am not going to stay where I am not wanted; besides"—an angry tear sparkled in her eye—"Aunt Mowry called me a circus horse."

"Why didn't she tell you that you belonged in the 'free for alls,' and be done with it?" burst forth her indignant listener, much to the amusement of a couple of passers-by.

"I've tried so hard to please her." Minerva's handkerchief went to her eyes.

Hooper took her by the arm. "This is no place to talk," he whispered. "That old guy on the corner, is looking at us."

The "old guy," who, by the way, was a benevolent and highly respected citizen, looked kindly after the young couple as they suddenly dived across the street and up Temple Place towards the Common. Down by the Frog Pond they found plenty of deserted seats, onto one of which Minerva sank and listlessly folded her hands.

"What do you think," she asked, in answer to Hooper's pleading look, "she made fun of my lovely pink dress that I copied from a French fashion paper. I shall never go back there. I am going to look for work."

"Why, you've just left plenty of it," cried he, in amazement.

"I will never go back there," she repeated, vehemently, "even if I have to live in a closet."

Hooper shook his head dubiously. It was a mighty great hardship this living alone, as he knew to his cost. And then a look of delight swept over his face, as he suddenly took possession of her hand.

"Minnie, how old are you?"

"Eighteen years, three months, and four days."

"I was twenty-one yesterday."

Minnie gazed through a blur of tears at the sparkling

fountain, which rose high in the air before it fell with a merry sound upon the surface of the pond.

"Let's get married."

"Married!" exclaimed she, turning towards him in open-eyed astonishment.

"That's what I said," responded Hooper, calmly.

"Why, what have you got to get married on?"

"My salary."

"It wouldn't keep you in cigars nor me in ribbons," answered the young lady, who had received her training in economy in Mrs. Mowry's household.

"I'll tell you a secret. I have been speculating."

"Gambling?" Minerva shrank away from him.

"Certainly not. I—now—. You see," he went on, in a confidential tone, "I borrowed \$500 from one of Mr. Adams' clients and invested it in stocks."

"Blocks?"

"Not yet," was the quick reply. "Stock bonds, and I made two thousand dollars. I paid back what I borrowed and I have fifteen hundred in the bank." By this time he had lessened the distance between them and was once again holding her hand. "Broome—you know Detective Broome—big man, great heart—he was going to help me furnish a flat and then I was going to surprise you by giving you a present of it, but so long as you've left home, we might as well get married now and get the flat afterwards."

"The idea!"

"Yes, I think it a great idea," said he, complacently.

To have Hooper help her find employment was right and what she expected, but to get married!

"I'll do nothing of the kind," she cried.

"Be careful," came the quick warning, "you are refusing a good nine by twelve room when a few moments ago you said you were willing to live in a closet. Minnie, say yes," he coaxed.

She resolutely shook her head in the negative.

"Say yes," he whispered, softly. "Minnie, why are your eyes like stars?"



She stopped shaking her head long enough to laugh at the absurdity of this question, and he followed up his advantage by quickly saying:

"I can get a license in less than an hour, and we then can be married by a minister I am acquainted with; and you will never have to wash any china—we won't have any in the house—and you can wear pink muslin dresses the whole year around, and have them covered with rosebuds. Oh, dear, rosebuds in your dark hair to match the pink in your cheeks! Think of it! To see you standing at the door when I come home nights!"

The loneliness, the longing, the love that was in his voice caused the trembling girl to rise, lest she should succumb to his pleading.

"Minnie, will you come?"

She could close her eyes, but not her ears. She started forward and before Hooper could realize it, she was hurriedly making her way towards the West Street entrance. Paying no heed to Hooper when he caught up to her, she darted across Tremont Street. At that moment she heard a warning cry. Raising her head she saw a horse tearing up the street. Unable to move, she stood terror-stricken in the path of the frightened animal, when suddenly she felt Hooper's arm about her waist, heard his voice in her ears, and she was swung back to the curb just as the horse dashed by. The frightened animal swerved to the right and ran up on the sidewalk towards St. Paul's church. The broken shafts that hung to his displaced harness swayed from side to side, causing disaster among many men and women who crowded that thoroughfare. Minerva's face turned ghastly pale at the sight of the fallen people. Hooper tenderly carried her to a nearby bench on the Common. Convulsively grasping him by the arm, she fell fainting across his chest.

When Minerva came to, the horse had been stopped and his victims, who were more frightened than hurt, had been cared for by the more fortunate ones. She still clung close to her lover, for protection against the terrors of this big,

cruel city. Nobody had time to notice the pair and, after a few minutes, Hooper, his arm thrown protectingly across her shoulder, hurried her along the walk and away from the crowd.

A couple of hours later Hooper walked briskly into Mr. Adams' office. Before he had time to deliver his well-framed excuse, Damon, who had been nervously pacing back and forth, came towards him and said:

"Hooper, where is Minerva?"

"How should I know?" said Hooper, with a sudden hardening of the voice.

"This lady says you do."

"Who else would know, if he didn't?" came in a stifled voice from the corner.

Hooper turned and beheld Aunt Jane in a state of weeping exhaustion. "The dear little thing slipped out of the house this morning without her breakfast—ran away from us like a wounded kitten. Who else would she go to for sympathy?"

"Hooper, where is she?" repeated Damon.

That young man stood before his employer in silence and with flushed face.

"Mrs. Mowry don't know that I came here," said Aunt Jane, between her sobs. "I came right after Minerva the moment I found she was gone. I am going to take her home with me."

"She's not going back."

"Hooper!" cried Damon, warningly.

"Of course she'll come home with me," cried her aunt. "I'll be good to her; she won't have to work in my house. I have plenty. I always wanted to give her money, but I was so afraid of Mrs. Mowry. Now, I don't care what happens, I am going to take the poor pet home with me."

"Minerva will not go back to live with any of you."

Damon caught his daring clerk's wrist in a grasp of steel.

"She will not go back," said the lad, in a voice of tremulous joy. "We are married."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A FAMILY JAR

MRS. MOWRY was in a towering passion, as all the inmates of her home could bear ample testimony. Since the discovery of Minerva's flight that morning, Mrs. Mowry's temper had been awful, even to contemplate. The very rocking-chair into which she had sunk upon hearing the bad news seemed to have partaken of her indignation. It creaked and groaned beneath her weight as she rocked to and fro in energetic protest against the unprecedented state of affairs in her hitherto well ordered household.

"The ingratitude of that girl!" she cried, for the twentieth time. "To leave me after all I have done for her!"

Louise turned away from the window where she had been standing and once again examined, with mournful curiosity, the note which Minerva had left on the dresser for her early that morning.

"Poor Minnie!" whispered Louise. "Gone to Boston to look for work."

"Did she have to go to Boston for it?" sarcastically questioned Mrs. Mowry, with a bitter look at the disorder of the usually well-arranged dining-room.

"Perhaps, mother, she may have wanted to be more independent."

The rocking-chair came to a sudden stop. "And what shall I do? Who have I to take her place?"

"I will do the work."

"You!"

The chair started off again in violent motion. "You!" contemptuously repeated her mother, as the chair again came to an indignant stop. "I guess you won't spoil your hands

and get all dragged out looking trying to do the work of this big house! Not much!"

"It seemed to agree with Minnie," returned Louise.

"You and Minnie are two different people."

Louise sighed in regretful corroboration of this fact, then walked listlessly to the window, where she gazed with unseeing eyes out upon the sun-flooded piazza.

"She was a bold girl, but a good housekeeper," slowly admitted Mrs. Mowry, after a long pause. To fill up the ensuing silence which Louise made no effort to break, her mother added: "I suppose I'll have to hire a servant."

"Minnie always sang at her work."

The elder lady looked up at this irrelevant remark and caught sight of a tear which glittered upon her daughter's pale cheek.

"Upon my honor," she wrathfully burst forth, "one would think we had lost a million dollars. Jane off to town like a mad woman at the heels of that unruly child; James taken to the woods with his pipe, like the peaceful coward that he is, and now you are snivelling like a baby."

This last remark was not greatly exaggerated, for Louise had sunk into a chair and was crying as if her heart would break.

"Wait until she gets back," called forth Mrs. Mowry, in a voice that proved how far she was from tears.

"She will never come back," sobbed Louise.

"Oh, won't she? She will be here by dark, if not before," declared the lady, in energetic contradiction. "Why, she has never been away from home a whole day in her life, and mark my words, she will never get a chance to slip away again. She's had altogether too much liberty for a young girl; running down to the Post Office and laughing and talking with that red-haired man—what's his name—Smith, Hooper Smith. Oh, my blood boils when I think how I have fed and clothed that girl since she was left to me when a mere child by her dying mother."

"Surely," gently protested Louise, "you will allow that Minnie earned her board and clothes."

"Earned nothing," was the testy retort. "When I think of my kindness!" reiterated the lady, with a mournful shake of her head. "Who was that king whose heart broke from ingratitude?"

"King Lear."

"Leer!" cried Mrs. Mowry, bursting into renewed passion. "That's just what she used to do to me. Leer whenever I tried to give her a piece of wholesome advice Louise," snapped out her mother, "you had better leave this room, if you can't do anything better than act as if there had been a death in the family. Am I ever going to get any peace in my old age?" she added, with sudden lifting of her hands to her face, in her endeavor to shut out the thought of the double misfortune that had descended upon her so recently—the loss of Mr. Blumenberg's fortune and Minerva's defection. At this sudden cessation of hostilities, the alarmed Louise rose and began noiselessly to put the room to rights.

Ethel had, fortunately, missed this family jar. Immediately after breakfast she had discreetly withdrawn to the garden. Under a large tree she sat, her hands busily employed with some needlework, her mind intent upon the beauty of the morning. Her little daughter's time was as busily, if not so profitably, employed in watching the frantic efforts of a bug to climb up out of a hole into which she had pushed it. After a while Ethel's sewing dropped to her lap as she gazed into the deep blue of the sky, across which stretched long lines of trailing white clouds.

"How peaceful it looks," was her thought, "and yet beneath it how many restless hearts there are that never know a minute's content. To be beneath this peaceful sky, near one you love, and to know you must live on, year after year, and make no sign; to need him and dare not call—"

She hid her face in her hands to shut out the blinding sun and the thought of the fast approaching time when she must return to her husband crept over her like a benumb-

ing frost. "I must go back for Lillie's sake"—and in quick fear at the power Damon had unconsciously gained over her heart she whispered hoarsely—"and for my own." She pressed her hands to her head, which throbbed with weariness and pain. "But not yet—not yet," she cried, in bitter protest. Suddenly she started at the sound of a soft voice in her ear.

"What are you thinking of, mamma—me?"

"No; of a friend, dear."

"Do I know him?"

Ethel smiled at the eager question and stroked her daughter's hair. "How did you know I was thinking of a gentleman?"

"Because I was."

"Why, why," gently chided her mother, "what gentleman were you thinking of?"

"Papa."

Ethel buried her face in the child's hair to hide the sudden rush of tears to her eyes. A gorgeous butterfly, at that moment fluttered by in the golden sunlight, and the child forgetful of everything else joyfully ran in pursuit of it. Ethel drew a deep sigh, folded her hands over her neglected sewing and once again became lost in the contemplation of the deep blue sky across which stretched the long lines of trailing, white clouds.

Presently she was aroused by a cry from Lillie who had disappeared behind the bushes. A moment later, Pythias Prince appeared bearing the weeping child in his arms. "Good morning, Mrs. Burton. Her forehead is slightly bruised, a little hot water will take down the swelling."

"I will take her indoors at once"—and in answer to the pleading question in his eyes—"I will send Louise into the garden, she needs the fresh air."

Upon Ethel's entrance, Louise, at a sign from her, quietly left the room. To hide her retreat, Ethel, as she poured into a bowl some warm water from the silver kettle on the table, said to Mrs. Mowry:

"My linen cover for that Boston firm is almost finished."

"Oh, Auntie," interrupted Lillie, "look at my bump." For fear Mrs. Mowry should slight the bruise by a mere casual glance, the child, unaware of her temerity, climbed upon the woman's lap to allow her a close inspection. "I fell right here on my head, and the butterfly got away. But the nice man picked me up."

"Man, what man?"

Ethel did not feel called upon to answer this abrupt question.

"What man?" repeated Mrs. Mowry, suspiciously.

"Why the man who picked me out of the dirt, and wiped my eyes, and kissed me," explained the child.

"I am surprised, Mrs. Burton, that you allow your little girl to speak to strangers."

"I have learned from experience not to try to interfere after anything has taken place." This remark was softened by a smile.

"Well said; I am a few years older than you, but I have learned that experience is a great teacher. What do you think of Minerva?" she asked grimly.

Ethel drew Lillie to her and in silence began to bathe her forehead.

"Simply because I gave her some good advice about her dress—flaunting around in her bows and bouquets—she flounced off and left me, her benefactress. You can see for yourself how everything is upset. Imagine my breakfast dishes not being washed at this late hour in the morning!"

"Poor child!"

Mrs. Mowry started to her feet and gave the chair a violent push. "Nobody seems to have any sympathy for me."

"Aren't you at all worried about her?" asked her listener in amazement.

The indignant woman jammed her ear trumpet tightly into her ear which act did not lessen the flood tide of her temper. "Worried? Of course I am. Not a soul here to help me with the dinner."

"I will."

"Where's Louise?" asked her mother, who did not wish to be indebted to Ethel who had substantially proved that she was able to earn both her own and her child's living.

"Let me cook a Southern dinner—Creole style," coaxed Ethel in her desire to leave Louise undisturbed.

"How long has your husband been dead?" questioned Mrs. Mowry when they were busy in the kitchen.

"Dead?"

The elder lady, who had not been taken into confidence as regarded Ethel's past life, waited, spoon in one hand, dish in the other, for the answer.

"A long while"—said Ethel at last, then added under her breath, "to me." The silence which Ethel sank into, Mrs. Mowry wisely forebore to break.

In the meantime, Louise's fleet footsteps bore her to the back gate where Pythias stood impatiently awaiting her. He took her by the hand, led her out through the fields and up the hill where the wind blew freely. Not until they reached the summit did he speak. Holding her white, tear stained face in his hands, he said:

"Tell me what has happened."

"Minerva has left home."

"Ah!" There was a strong cry of relief in his voice. "I thought something had happened to you, dearie."

"Why, what could happen to me?"

"Nothing, I hope." He stooped and kissed her cold cheek, the fortune-teller's warning lying like a dead weight on his heart.

"Isn't it dreadful about Minnie?"

"A mere childish whim; she will return before dark."

"You don't know Minerva as well as I do. She forgives readily but when she gets real angry she does not forget. She will never come back."

"Perhaps Minerva was right," he whispered, his arms tightening about the slight figure. "She is quite able to take care of herself under any circumstances. There



always comes a time when we feel that we must strike out for the middle of the stream. Minerva simply got her desire early in life. I admire her courage. It would be good if some of us followed her example."

"No, no!" Louise shrank away in fear. "I could not leave my mother," she cried in answer to the anxious invitation in his voice.

"Do you intend to remain forever a victim to her iron will? The time has arrived when you need me." Louise closed her eyes in dumb assent. "I have a plan to cure your mother of her deafness which I think is but a nervous affliction. You remember she promised you to the man who would cure her."

"Words uttered without thought."

Pythias shrugged his shoulders. "She must abide by them."

"Should you fail?"

"I shall come for you just the same. In place of luxury I will give you love and protection. Will you come?"

"I will." With the simplicity of a child she moved towards him to be enfolded in his outstretched arms.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### A YOUNG SCOUT

MR. BROOME, in his tall hat, frock coat, and light trousers, was quite a different looking man from Mr. Broome in his ordinary working suit of blue, as anyone could see if he happened to notice that gentleman a few days after his friend Hooper's hasty marriage, when he was hurrying towards the depot on his way to the bridegroom's suburban home. The first formal dinner in the house that Mr. Broome had helped to select, warranted, he thought, a few extra flourishes. So he came to a sudden stop at a flower-stand, near the depot, and bought a large bouquet for the bride, together with a white pink for the lapel of his coat. Before he reached the entrance of the depot his eagle eyes lighted on Mr. Adams' office boy, who was aimlessly standing in the doorway of the main entrance, his large boots somewhat impeding the steady flow of incoming and outgoing passengers.

"Hullo, Albert!" called out Mr. Broome. "What are you doing around here?"

"Waiting for you."

"Indeed," said Mr. Broome, to this unexpected reply. "Your devotion is simply touching. Speaking of touching"—his voice became confidential—"do you want to borrow some money?"

"Want to give me any?" At once Albert deserted his position in the doorway for one beside his friend.

"Why should I impoverish myself to supply your demands?" asked Mr. Broome, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Dunno; errands I may do for you next week, perhaps." The boy's smile was all embracing.

"Well, I'll be blowed! Your exhibition of cheek is just splendid."

When the child saw there was no money coming from that quarter, he complacently drew from his pocket a grimy hand, in which lay two dimes and a nickle.

"Ah, you found someone easier than me?"

"The crazy lodger at our house. She gives me lots of money for doing her errands."

Mr. Broome ignored the reproach conveyed in the last sentence. His indifference, however, was somewhat affected by Albert's next remark.

"I want you to see her."

"Thanks; my visiting list is filled." They had passed through the waiting room and were out near the trains. "Very kind of you, but you'd better count me out on this deal—I am not making a collection of crazy women," laughed the detective, as he made a start for his train.

Albert clutched at the tail of the man's coat. "But she paid me to get you."

"Paid you to get me?" Mr. Broome paused in surprise.


"She asked me to get her a minister, so I thought you'd do." Albert's voice was quite paternal.

"Your delicate piece of flattery does not win me. Ministering angel to a crazy woman is not exactly my forte. Besides, my train starts in a minute."

The boy still held on to the coat. "But she paid me to get a minister and I don't know any," persisted the child.

The detective hesitated a minute, then at the thought of the appetizing dinner awaiting him he moved for his train. But the disappointed look in the boy's eyes, together with a slight pang of conscience, deterred him. "Hang it all!" he exclaimed, turning back. "Where is she?"

Albert made a bee-line for the door and shambling down the street towards the West End. Presently they came to a dark, narrow alley, teeming with noisy children. Down this congested place Albert led the way to a big tenement



house, before which he stopped until Mr. Broome had cheerfully contributed his bouquet among the clamoring, begging children who were crowding about him. Up the stairs went Albert, past a beautiful little Jewess, who smiled up at her brother's big companion. Mr. Broome smiled in return and let fall his last flower, the pink from his button-hole, into her eager, outstretched hands. In the darkness he followed the boy up the steep flights of stairs until they reached the top floor of the house and halted before the half-open door of a small bedroom. As Albert softly entered, Mr. Broome saw in the dusk the figure of a tall, thin woman that was rigidly outlined against the window. So quiet she sat a feeling as if in the presence of the dead came over Broome. Her cold, passionless voice did but increase this feeling.

"You have been a good boy," she said to Albert, then motioned for him to leave the room.

"My good sir," she said abruptly to Mr. Broome, who had quietly slipped into a chair at the other side of the window, "I am in trouble—great trouble."

"Money?" he asked, with ready sympathy.

"Money!" exclaimed the woman, contemptuously, drawing from the pocket in her dress a roll of bills and a pack of cards. "I can earn all the money I want by shuffling these—and reading the expressive faces of my credulous listeners," she added with a harsh laugh.

Broome raised his eyes curiously towards the speaker's face, which was hidden by the darkness.

"Mine tells the story of a disappointed life," she muttered, as if in answer to his unspoken question. "My heart was broken years ago. My spirit now is broken. You can live a long time with a broken heart—you can bear sorrow, see your loved ones die, you can weather misfortune, see your home devastated, your family scattered, and yet, somehow, live on. But to have one's spirit broken! I feel that I have lost my grip upon life. I am slipping, but I won't go alone." In her excitement she rose. "He shall go with me, if I have to drag him by the hair of the head."

Her listener looked inquiringly around the room.

"You won't find him in this house. He'll bother my home no more."

"Wayward son?" suggested Mr. Broome, who was beginning to wonder at the outcome of the adventure Adams' mild-looking office boy had swung him into.

"My son-in-law—twice over." She sank back into her chair and leaned her head against the wall. "To think of that reptile making a nest of anyone's home," she muttered. "Night and day my thoughts are filled with his villainy," she said, leaning towards the man who was now narrowly watching her every movement. "You are not a minister," she declared, abruptly.

"No."


"I thought not," she said, quietly. "Never mind; I must tell my story. Besides, I don't want prayers and advice."

"Sympathy," hinted the man, softly.

"Yes; we women — Faugh! We can never successfully battle with the world until we have killed that craving for sympathy." Burying her face in her hands she sat motionless.

In silence Broome keenly scrutinized her by the light of the moon, which now slanted through the window across her. The life and strife in the street below came faintly up to him. He hoped that Hooper and his bride had long since given him up and sat down to the wonderful meal without him. He mentally thanked Albert for bringing him to this woman, for beneath her smouldering passion, which his keen wit refused to believe was dementia, was a story.

"I was born in the South," began the woman, with a sudden uplifting of her head, "New Orleans. And I married there a Southern gentleman many years my senior. About ten years after, the sudden loss of his fortune killed him and left me alone and penniless with our little girl. A handsome child she was, and when a few years later I married a Northern man, I left her in the South with her father's



relatives, who would give her all that wealth could bring. We corresponded frequently and once a year she came North to see me and her little half-sister. After fifteen years of happiness with my second husband I lost him—fever—and misfortunes never coming singly, I received word to come South, that my daughter was dying. It was a cruel story. She had been secretly married to a man who had abused her—in fact, he killed the frail creature by his neglect and brutality. She refused to tell me his name, asking what good it would do now, since it was all over and she was dying. But some years after her death I came across letters of hers which revealed his name. But it was then too late—he had married my other daughter.”

The woman buried her face in her hands and moaned.

“The scoundrel!”

“Well you might call him that, for when I faced him with the truth,” she went on rapidly, “he laughed in my face and bade me tell my daughter she was married to her sister’s husband.”

“Then?”

“I never told her. I kept the bitter truth to myself—I would have let the miserable secret die with me had he not deserted her and their little girl.”

The detective leaned forward with bated breath.

“She was of a different calibre from her Southern sister. When he abused her she defied him and he, finding she was no tool for his evil purposes and crimes—crimes, I tell you—he left her. He may have broken her heart, but not her spirit. Afterwards, when I saw her bravely fighting the battle for her child and me, I stole away. After a year’s wandering, I finally tracked him here.”

“Ah!”

“Only to discover that my poor child had come North and was once more in his clutches. Think of it!” She ground her teeth in a paroxysm of rage. “Once again in the power of—”

“Her husband—Charles Burton.”

The woman sprang to her feet. "You—you know him. Perhaps you have an account to settle with him. But you shall not kill him. I intend to do that."

Broome sprang towards her as she darted to the door.

"Not to-night," he whispered, hoarsely, a detaining hand upon her shoulder. "Time enough to settle with him. I'll not kill the cowardly hound," he said softly to the struggling woman. "Give me but two days to find him. You may then settle accounts—or I'll place him where human vengeance will not be needed."

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE BIRD HAS FLOWN

MR. BROOME hurriedly carried the woman, who had suddenly collapsed in his arms, to the narrow cot in the corner, and laid her down as tenderly as if she had been a child.

"Quick! Some water!" cried the man, upon the sudden appearance of Albert in the doorway.

At the touch of cold water on her brow the woman quickly opened her eyes and gazed vacantly about the room, then her lids slowly closed again.

"Slap her hands," sharply ordered Broome of the frightened boy. "We must not let her go," he cried, as he applied water to her brow, also some to her wrists and lips. "In her weakened condition she might not come to again. Call your mother," he whispered, a minute later, with a look of fear at the rigid figure on the bed.

"Out nursing," came the laconic explanation.

"Get a doctor," he commanded, sharply.

"She's a long way from death," was the little doctor's cheerful verdict. "What she needs is plenty of sleep and lots of good food. But," he cautioned, "she requires careful watching to-night; this medicine must be given to her every three hours."

"All right," answered Broome, in a business-like tone.

"Good!" said the physician, with satisfaction. "I will call again in the morning."

Left alone, the detective drew off his coat and carefully hung it across the back of a chair.

"You're going to stay," joyfully said Albert, when he appeared, a few minutes later, from the kitchen, where he had been ordering his young and inquisitive sister to bed.



"It looks like it," responded Broome, from the frail chair by the window.

"We'll play cards," chuckled the child.

"You'll go to bed," said his listener, with an uneasy movement which made the frail chair creak beneath his big weight. "I want you to be at Mr. Adams' office bright and early to-morrow morning to tell Hooper Smith that I was detained here on business all night and so missed his dinner party." Broome heaved a sigh of regret at the thought of the delicious food he had missed. "But not a word to Mr. Adams," he said, in a warning voice. "I want to talk to him myself."

"Makes me sick," amicably volunteered Albert, from his position on the floor beside his illustrious guest.

"That's a nice way to talk of your employer," admonished his listener.

"I mean Smith—won't talk to common folks since he got married. He has steak, fried potatoes, hot biscuits and coffee every morning for his breakfast."

"I thought he didn't talk to you since his marriage," insinuated Broome.

"He don't; just repeats it to himself when we are alone in the office. I'm sorry he's married," added the boy, sadly.

"Indeed! A case of blighted affection on your part?" quizzed the big man with a twinkle of his eyes.

"No—coffee. Hooper used to send me for it mornings; now he don't."

"Strange," mused his listener. "There's nothing about your appearance that would lead me to think you yearned to run errands."

"The fat lady at the coffee counter used to give me extra coffee for doing her errands, and I used to go in doorways and drink my share out of Hooper's pail," explained Albert, regretfully. "I met her to-night," he went on, "while I was waiting for you at the depot, and she said 'Hullo, dear.' She told me to come in and see her any time—she missed my smiling countenance."

"You certainly do wear an All's-right-with-the-world sort of a smile," laughed the man.

Albert gave a blink of delight at this approbation, which blink Broome mistook for a sign of sleepiness. "You'd better go to bed," he added.

"I don't go to bed so early," remonstrated his small companion.

"You'd better," Broome urged. "If I need you in the night I'll call."

At this mark of confidence in his ability, the boy rose and slipped from the room.

After a while Broome took up the small kerosene lamp his young host had supplied and by its meagre light he scanned the face of his patient who, under the influence of the doctor's soothing draught, was quietly sleeping. "She's slipping," he said in sad contemplation of the wan face that yet showed traces of great beauty. "I believe there's not much life left in her poor bones."

He placed the lamp on the bureau and improvised a shade by standing his evening paper before it. The air in the small room seemed stifling to the man who went and sat by the window in hopes of catching the light, refreshing breeze that swept past but not into the window. The noise of the children in the street far below had long since ceased. Gradually the sounds of life in the house died away. At midnight the whole neighborhood seemed to sleep. The moon now hung low in the West, a ball of red fire that turned even mean objects into stately beauty. Each time he gave the woman her medicine, she moaned and stirred, only to fall again into a quiet sleep. Towards morning, when the sky became pallid and the air clear, the woman suddenly sat up in bed. In an instant Mr. Broome was at her side.

"Have you killed him?" she whispered, hoarsely.

"Not yet," was the soothing reply.

"Then I must."

He gently forced her back on the bed. "Wait until daylight," he urged.

"Daylight—daylight," she assented drowsily, her head falling back on the pillow.

"Where shall we find him?" eagerly questioned Broome.

"In the country," answered the woman, with an effort to lift her eyelids.

"Country!" repeated the disappointed man.

"In the city he hides like a rat among his kind. I've seen him in the country—in the country—" Her voice died away and once more she slept.

At dawn a plump little woman came up the stairs and stood in the doorway looking in surprise at the stranger by the window. "I told her she would kill herself," she half sobbed, as she followed his gaze to the bed in the corner. "Indeed I will nurse her," she replied in answer to the man's earnest appeal. "I will do everything in my power for her."

"Mr. Adams will pay you liberally," concluded Broome.

"Money!" cried Albert's mother. "She's got plenty, and so generous with it, too. Why, it was only yesterday she gave me enough to buy Albert a pair of shoes. The ones he's wearing now are a little large," she admitted. "They belong to his brother who is away with my husband working at the beaches for the summer. It's lonesome without them," she sighed; "but she, our lodger, has been good company for us for the last month. She's a Gypsy," whispered the woman; "but she's good. Never fear," she added, following Broome to the door. "I'll take care of her; that is, if she will only mind me. She likes to have her own way. But never fear, I'll take care of her."

"I'll get a good meal into my system before I begin to think," said the hungry man, on his way down the narrow, creaking stairs of the silent house. But even after he had eaten a substantial breakfast in a nearby restaurant, and had returned to his own room at the farther end of the city, he was still no nearer the solution of the Burton mystery. "She gave me a lot of information," he mused, as he divested himself of his gala attire, "but no clues. I wonder where the precious rascal keeps himself," he said for the twelfth time.

"Gee Whiz!" he ejaculated, a few minutes later, as he vigorously rubbed his shaving soap into a lather. "Rather a tough looking joint that for anyone to live in—much less that Southern gentlewoman."

He gazed complacently about his own snug quarters, which he had made homelike by the addition of numerous pictures on the walls and mantelpiece, together with a superabundance of papers, magazines and books—for Mr. Broome was quite a reader in his own way, not to speak of the various colored sofa cushions and pillows that one would not expect to find in an ordinary bachelor apartment. Then his eyes fell on his pipe. Oh, how he longed for a smoke! But no delays; he had work to do that morning. He would smoke a cigar on his walk down to Mr. Adams' office. So he argued as he proceeded to shave himself. In the middle of his task a knock came at the door.

"Confound it!" he savagely exclaimed, under his breath. "Come in!" he called out, with a poor attempt to make his voice sound light and pleasant.

"Mr. Broome!"

That man turned abruptly away from the looking-glass and faced a dark, heavy-looking man, who stood just within the door.

"I thought you were the servant," hastily explained Mr. Broome.

"She said for me to come right up, when I told her my business was urgent."

Mr. Broome felt of his half-shaven face.

"Don't mind me," expostulated the man, as he seated himself in the chair Broome pushed towards him. "You are a detective?" asked the stranger, when Broome had returned to the looking-glass.

"Yes, but I take cases only from my chief."

"Mine is a peculiar one. I am a stranger in town and heard of you in an indirect way. It's about my wife," said the man abruptly.

"Run off with another man?" queried his listener who,

with a few dexterous strokes of his razor, had completed his task and was now standing before him.

"No, I wish she had."

Broome gave the speaker a penetrating look. He was not impressed in his favor.

"My case is a peculiar one, involving plenty of money—"

"I refuse to take it," said Broome, shortly.

The man rose at this curt refusal. "I supposed you would take an outside case for plenty of money."

"We are all apt to make mistakes."

"We are," agreed the man.

When the door closed behind him, Broome saw the card which the man had left upon the table

"I wonder who he was," he said to himself as he approached it. He turned away quickly, saying aloud: "Well, what difference does it make, anyhow?"

A detective, in one respect, at least, resembles the average woman. A woman's curiosity leads to gossip, sometimes to scandal. A detective's may lead to clues.

There seemed to be an attraction in the little piece of pasteboard. Broome glanced towards the table. "Well, I might as well keep it. I may run across him some time. Then, if I do, I shall not need an introduction."

He stepped quickly to the table and picked up the card. The next instant he had thrown it upon the floor and ground it beneath his heel.

"Well, I'll be blowed! The very man I wanted—Charles Burton!"

## CHAPTER XXVI

### DR. REICHENBACH

HALF an hour later Mr. Broome arrived at Mr. Adams' office, only to find that he had just left for Riverdale. Calling out to the surprised Hooper a hurried apology for his absence the night before, together with a promise to explain further later, he hastened from the building, and made a bee-line for the depot. He decided he was doomed to disappointment that morning, for when he reached the depot the train for Riverdale—in which was Damon—was just disappearing down the track.

Accompanying Damon was Pythias Prince who, much to Damon's half contemptuous amusement, was disguised in a brown wig, blue glasses and loose-fitting clothes. To Damon's relief, this disguise, which Pythias had insisted upon assuming, the better to carry out his little plot against Mrs. Mowry, was not penetrated by this august-eyed woman. Perhaps she was too busily engaged in studying the card that Pythias had handed her upon his presentation by Damon, and which read: "Dr. Bernard Reichenbach, Antwerp. Aurist."

"I have a warm spot in my heart for Germans," cordially burst forth that woman who, somehow, had got the idea into her head that all European cities were situated on the banks of the Rhine. "Allow me to present to you my daughter."

No wonder Mrs. Mowry's voice was full of pride, for to Louise's cheeks, which had been too pale of late, rose a bright color that gave added lustre to her eyes which no amount of fretting had dimmed as yet. The proud mother beamed with satisfaction at the unmistakable interest this

great doctor, Damon's friend, was already evincing in her daughter. "Love at first sight," complacently thought the woman, as she formally ushered her distinguished guest into the parlor—the state room of the house. "Here are money and brains combined," and once more she beamed on perceiving Louise's evident interest in the doctor.

"Before Doctor Reichenbach treats you, perhaps it would be well for you to tell him how your deafness was caused," suggested Damon, with a guilty feeling that he was a party to an innocent but nevertheless well-planned conspiracy.

"You tell the story," urged Mrs. Mowry.

"About four months ago," began Damon, "Mrs. Mowry had occasion to visit Wrentham, to see an aged aunt who was very ill and who has since died. She went alone and stopped at Mansfield Station on the Plover road, there being no depot in Wrentham. She arrived late in the afternoon and expected to find her aunt's hired man waiting for her with a team. He was not there. There is no stage line and the stable-keeper in Mansfield, though ready to let her a team, did not wish to go himself. Mrs. Mowry knows how to handle the ribbons—"

"I ought to know something about horses. I was brought up with them, you might say," interrupted that lady.

"So she decided to drive the six miles alone," continued Damon. "She proceeded in safety for about two miles, when she was startled at a cross-road to find a man right at her horse's head. She screamed."

"I did not," indignantly contradicted Mrs. Mowry. "I said, 'Get up!' What are you smiling at, Louise? Of course, I meant the horse."

"The man caught the horse by the bridle and he came to a stop, much to Mrs. Mowry's dismay."

"Yes, I was startled," acknowledged that woman, "but he spoke very quickly—lucky for him that he did."

"Tell them why, mother," prompted Louise, half fearfully.

"I had a package of red pepper in my pocket, and I put my hand upon it, when—"

"He said he wished to ride a short distance if she would kindly allow him to," continued Damon, to fill up Mrs. Mowry's significant pause. "He spoke in a gentlemanly way and she consented."

"Consented?" cried she. "What else could I do? Why, I was never so struck up in all my life."

"He offered to drive and she allowed him to. He used the whip freely and they spun along, when, at another cross-road they met a man on horseback. The horseman called out: 'Stop! Stop!' But Mrs. Mowry's companion lashed the horse, and the race commenced. On they dashed, when suddenly a report was heard and a bullet whistled near Mrs. Mowry's head."

"Oh!" cried Louise, to whom this story never lost its interest. "I should have fallen in the bottom of the carriage."

"So should I—if there had been room," declared her mother, grimly.

"Her companion drew a revolver and fired the whole six barrels at the horseman. He must have hit the horse, for he fell, and Mrs. Mowry and her companion left him in the road. You should have been around, Mr. Broome, to have unravelled that mystery," said Damon turning to the detective who had quietly entered the room at the beginning of the narrative, and had listened intently to every word.

"It is not too late yet," he answered, softly

"What's the use of probing the mystery?" pettishly exclaimed Mrs. Mowry. "It won't bring me back my hearing. Yes, the revolver report deprived me of my hearing. I hope, however, to be happily cured." She bowed to the doctor, who returned her winning smile with a reassuring nod of his head. "The man on horseback," she went on to explain, "was undoubtedly a robber, or meant to be one. My companion was a gentleman, as he seemed to be—Mr. Conrad Blumenberg."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Mr. Broome, quickly, "but what kind of a looking man is this Mr. Blumenberg?"



"There is his picture on the mantelpiece," said Mrs. Mowry, who had not had the heart since that man's defection to take it from its proud position among her most cherished treasures.

Mr. Broome crossed the room for a nearer view of the photograph, and as his eyes rested upon it he gave a low whistle of surprise.

"What's the matter?" eagerly questioned Mrs. Mowry, in the wild hope that Mr. Broome could tell her good tidings of the absent man.

For an answer Mr. Broome pushed the picture into Damon's hand, with the hurried inquiry: "Do you know him?"

"Slightly," answered he, with ill-concealed dislike.

"Yes, yes, but has he ever been in your office?" anxiously interrogated the detective.

"No, indeed," was the decisive answer.

"Well, I'll be—" Mr. Broome paused as if at a loss for a word that would adequately express his feelings and not be offensive to the company; then he thrust the picture in his pocket, grabbed his hat, and the next instant he had disappeared through the open door, before the people in the room had time to realize what had happened.

"Well, I never saw the like!" Mrs. Mowry at last found voice to say. "He has taken Mr. Blumenberg's picture and my lovely silver frame. Mr. Adams, I must say that your Mr. Duster—"

"Does create quite a stir," quietly put in Damon. "But detectives never do such odd things without some good reason," argued he, as much at a loss for the reason of Mr. Broome's strange conduct as was Mrs. Mowry. "He will be heard from—"

"And so will I if he dares to insinuate anything against Mr. Blumenberg," retorted that lady, sharply. "I wish he was here and he would teach Mr. Broome some manners—which he greatly needs."

"You are very nervous," broke in the doctor's gentle

voice. "You will take these pills for me, will you not? Ya, very goot! And these t'ree leetle drops out of this vial into the ear every t'ree hours. Goot! And you will lie down for a leetle while after to give the head and ears a rest?"

"Of course you will stay to dinner, Doctor," coaxed his hostess, her anger quite dissipated by the great man's almost endearing manner.

The invitation was accepted almost hungrily by the doctor, certainly with an alacrity that might have aroused Mrs. Mowry's suspicions had not her vanity been overfed with the doctor's very evident admiration for Louise. Of course her beautiful daughter was bound to make a good match—even if she could not wed a title. Mrs. Mowry's eyes involuntarily sought the mantelpiece, and her face flushed in anger at the sight of the empty space where had shone her silver frame.

"Louise, won't you show Doctor Reichenbach the grounds?" she said, fearful that her rage at Mr. Broome would burst forth again. "That detective is little better than a horse thief," she declared to Damon, when Louise and the Doctor had left the room. "By the way," she added, suddenly, "where did Ethel disappear to? I should think she would have manners enough to wait and see you who have been so good to her. But no, the moment your name was mentioned, up she starts, and with Lillie by her side off she goes to the woods. I wonder what some people see in the woods. A lot of old caterpillars and bugs. Give me a good newspaper and a comfortable chair. Why, Damon, you're not going—not before dinner?"

"Yes, I must."

Damon had risen at the sound of Ethel's name and mechanically picked up his hat. His taking from his pocket a time-table to see when the next train started was what called forth Mrs. Mowry's reproachful question, which she repeated with growing indignation.

"I leave a good substitute," said Damon, with a wistful look at the happy pair on the lawn.

"Ah, but there is no one like you, Damon," said Mrs. Mowry, with a feeling which she rarely gave utterance to.

"Well," replied he, at a loss for a better excuse, "I ought to go and see if I can find Mr. Broome."

"You're right! That man needs watching," agreed his companion, her eyes flashing with righteous anger.

"I don't like Damon's appearance," mused Mrs. Mowry, a few minutes later from her position at the window, as she watched that man's retreating figure down the walk. "He looks peaky of late."

Damon paused when half way down the walk and his good resolution wavered. She was in the woods with Lillie! He would go there! He must see her once more! But no, it was her desire to avoid him and he remembered that he had virtually promised to obey her wish. No, he must not see her. There was only one consolation—she loved him.

"Damon, there is no one like you," had been said many times to him, and yet at the moment of leaving Mrs. Mowry's grounds never was more forcibly thrust upon him the bitter truth that he was doomed to wander the earth alone. He looked towards the hill where the sweetest words that he had ever heard were so bravely spoken to him; then he turned abruptly and walked quickly towards the station.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE HIDDEN MAN.

It was Mr. Broome's desire, when he left Mrs. Mowry's house so unceremoniously, to get back as quickly as possible to Boston, where in the quiet of his own room, he could think out his best plan of action.

"Although sitting up all night—no matter in how good a cause—does not leave one's thinking apparatus in the pink of condition," he reflected, as he hurried down the road to the depot, "my avocation may be nursing, but if I don't soon wind up this case, I'll certainly begin to think that detective work is not my vocation." He drew from his pocket the picture which he had torn from its moorings on Mrs. Mowry's mantelpiece—as he expressed it—and regarded it curiously. "Mr. Adams told me Mr. Burton has brown hair and wears blue glasses, yet strangely enough, this man"— he gave the picture an emphatic shake which almost dislodged it from its silver frame—"who is dark and handsome, leaves Charles Burton's card in my room this morning."

So intent were Mr. Broome's thoughts upon the picture, that he failed to notice he had taken the wrong turn, until he was brought to a realizing sense of his surroundings by a gleeful laugh that suddenly floated down upon his ears. He stopped short and looked about him to get his bearings. He was on a quiet country road, along the sides of which grew trees and bushes, and coming down the hill which seemed to loom directly before him, was a tall young woman in black, with a little girl by her side. On the child's head was a wreath of wild flowers, and in the mother's hand was a big bouquet of the same.

Mr. Broome raised his hat when they drew near. "Can you tell me the way to the depot?"

"Take the first turn back—" The woman's voice trailed away into silence.

The detective looked down to see the cause of her alarm and became aware that he had forgotten to slip the picture back into his pocket. "You know him?" he questioned, eagerly, the picture held out for her closer inspection. "Pardon me," Broome hastened to say. "I thought you lived in this neighborhood." He glanced from her uncovered hair, which the wind had coaxed into what the admiring detective mentally called "accordion plated curls," to the child, who had merrily danced past them down the road, as though bound for a familiar destination.

"May I ask how you came by that picture?" asked the woman, in a voice which she strove to make calm.

"Certainly," said Broome, with alacrity. "I—" He paused abruptly. "I borrowed it," he finished, awkwardly. "Indeed I intend to return it," he added, reassuringly. "I borrowed it for a few days."

"Borrowed it?"

"Yes, from Mrs. Mowry; estimable lady—lives on that big estate back there."

"Mrs. Mowry's?" broke in his listener, incredulously. "I never saw it there."


"Perhaps you have seen the original," softly suggested Mr. Broome.

She held out her hand slowly and took the picture from him.

"His name is Conrad Blumenberg" the detective suavely continued.

"Conrad Blumenberg!" With a low cry she threw the picture from her as if it were a tainted thing.

"You are ill, madam," cried Broome in alarm, taking a hurried step to the low stone wall, where she sank all white and trembling. She put out one hand, which he mistook for a gesture of fear.



"My name is Mr. Broome," he said hurriedly. "I am acquainted with Mrs. Mowry and I am a great friend of Mr. Damon Adams. Ah, you know him! He is now at Mrs. Mowry's," continued the man, eagerly. "Let me take you there."

"No, no!" She rose to her feet at once. "I am all right! I am all right!" she repeated, only to sink forlornly down again.

Just then the child who had come back for her mother, darted for the silvery object on the grass. "Papa!" rang out her joyous cry.

The detective turned like a flash. "Your name, child?"

"Lillie Burton."

"Ah!" came his savage cry of triumph. "Conrad Blumenberg and Charles Burton are one and the same man!" The chain of evidence was complete. Hardly were the words out of his mouth when he turned in sudden pity to the white-faced woman near the wall. "I forgot—you are his wife."

"You meant no harm," she whispered, with a smile which belied the pain in her eyes. "The first turn back—"

"But I cannot leave you here alone," he expostulated.

"It is the kindest act you can do for me," came the trembling reply. "Besides, I am not alone." She pointed to the child who had drawn near with the picture held in delight high above her head for her mother to gaze upon.

Mr. Broome turned abruptly away, but not before he saw the mother suddenly stretch out her arms and convulsively clasp the child to her heart.

When Mr. Broome had proceeded some distance down the road the woman had pointed out, he turned a sharp curve and came face to face with the original of the picture, Charles Burton, alias Conrad Blumenberg, the man he was most anxious to meet.

"How do you do," said Broome, stopping short.

The man scowled and would have passed on with a surly nod, but the detective, maintaining his position in front of

him, murmured something about Burton's morning call on him.

"This is no place to talk business," exclaimed Burton, attempting to pass on.

"As well here as anywhere," was the quick reply.

"I have no work to give you now."

"Got another detective to dog your wife, or are you going to hound her yourself?"

Burton's face grew white with rage. "Mind your own business."

"That's what I'm doing," curtly declared the set-faced man before him. "That is the reason I want to know why you are prowling around this neighborhood."

"Prowling?" said the man between his teeth. "I don't like the word."

"You are right! Prowling is done at night," came the quick, pointed answer. "Sneaking is a better word. Are you around here, Charles Burton, to waylay and threaten your wife? Or do you hope by some chance to encounter and make love to the young lady on the hill, as Conrad Blumenberg?"

Burton's hand slid to his hip pocket, but Broome with a quick jerk of his arm, sent the man's hand flying upward. With a snarl of rage, he gave the detective a savage kick which sent him half stunned on his back in the middle of the road. When Broome struggled to his feet, his assailant was making rapid progress down the road towards the station. What was Broome's relief to see Damon Adams turn in on the road from a little lane just ahead of Burton.

"Stop him!" shouted Broome, waving his hands towards the man to whom Damon was coldly lifting his hat.

"Catch him!" yelled Broome, almost frantic at Damon's blank look of inquiry. "*He is Charles Burton.* I have a warrant for his arrest."

Burton jerked himself free from Damon's sudden grasp and started on a run down the road, with the enraged Damon in hot pursuit.

"If someone would only come from the other direction he would surely be caught," groaned Broome, who had overtaken Damon.

"Nobody ever seems to be on this back road," cried Damon, in disgust.

As they neared the little wooden depot the sound of a distant train was heard. "He will catch it, and give us the slip," ground out Broome.

"He can't; it's the Boston express," replied his companion, exultantly.

Burton, who seemed to be pretty well winded from his run, just then darted across the road and up onto the platform. At the sound of the shrill whistle of the train he turned his head and laughed triumphantly at his pursuers, who were still some distance behind. At that moment a gaunt, pale-faced woman stepped out from the deserted station and moved towards him. Burton started back from her uplifted, accusing hand, lost his balance, tottered for a moment on the edge of the platform, then rolled off onto the track. With that pale, revengeful face before him, his whole frame shaken by the physical shock, realizing there was not time for him to regain his feet, he made a frantic attempt to drag his body clear of the approaching train. In this he partially succeeded, but the great steel wheels passed over his legs crushing them below the knee.

Damon stopped with a groan and turned away his face from the sight. Broome continued on, and was the first to reach the bleeding, inert form, which but a moment before had been an arrogant man in the full vigor of health.

There was life in him, however, as Damon and Broome soon found out when they lifted him, with the help of the station agent, onto the platform.

Damon hailed a farmer who, fortunately, happened to be passing by with a big, covered wagon.

"To Mrs. Mowry's," he said, when the injured man was placed in the bottom of the wagon, with his head resting in Mr. Broome's lap. "I have had the agent telephone to



Dr. Saunders, the great surgeon who lives near Mrs. Mowry. He will be on hand almost as soon as we get to her home. Pythias will be there and can at least stop the flow of blood. Hurry, man, for God's sake! We may yet save his life!"

Far down the road, as they turned a sharp curve slowly, lest the wagon too roughly jolt the unconscious man with the bloodless face and mangled limbs, they encountered a tall, handsome woman, with a dancing child, who had to step aside to allow them to pass.

Broome, from his secluded position in the covered wagon, looked helplessly from this sweet, sad-faced woman down at his ghastly burden, then hopelessly at Damon who sat beside him, his head bowed low between his clenched hands. Turning from him he peered back down the road at the gaunt figure following relentlessly in their wake, and he drew his hand across his eyes to keep back the sudden, smarting, blinding tears, at sight of the woman and child, who, all unconscious of the inexorable fate that was closing in about them, stood at one side of the road to allow the covered wagon to pass.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### "PRAY FOR ME"

THEY bore the injured man into the room that Mrs. Mowry and Louise had hastily got in readiness after the hurried entrance of Dr. Saunders, who stood at the bed, prepared to do all in his power to help the sufferer. It was with little ceremony he immediately requested that he should be left alone with his patient. He retained Pythias, however, who had been introduced to him by Mrs. Mowry as Dr. Reichenbach. With his help, Dr. Saunders deftly cut the cloths from the unconscious man's legs. They had been tightly bandaged above the knee by Damon and Broome, with clothes that had been given them by the station agent, and in this way a considerable loss of blood had been averted. Nevertheless, after a hasty examination of Burton's heart, the doctor raised his head and motioned for Pythias to close the case of instruments.

"We won't need them," he said, soberly. Then he added, after he had poured a powerful stimulant into a small glass: "It would be brutal to amputate the legs of a man who has but a few hours to live."

"Is there no hope?" With trembling hands Pythias laid the case of instruments back upon the table.

"None; his heart was evidently in a bad state from over exertion of some kind, and the shock of the accident following upon that was simply too much for him. Better tell the people outside," added the surgeon, as he gently lifted Burton's head and slowly let the stimulant trickle down his throat.

The moment Dr. Reichenbach broke the sad news to the anxious, terror-stricken group in the entry, Broome leaned

forward and whispered a few words in Damon's ear. With a quick look of appeal to Louise, that man caught her by the hand and with her hurried from the house.

In the meantime, within the chamber, the sick man, under the influence of the powerful stimulant, had come back to consciousness, and to a bitter realization of his utter helplessness.

"Well, I'd rather be dead than live in this mutilated condition," he said, angrily, as he read his doom in the surgeon's face.

Silently the doctor gathered up the pieces of blood-stained clothes and placed them, together with his case of instruments, behind a screen in a corner. His gaze happening to fall upon a silk coverlet that was folded on the back of a chair, he gathered it up and threw it across the bed to hide the outline of the man's body. "I've done all I could for you," he gently said, at last, to the man whose eyes had been wistfully following his movements.

"Has he no relatives?" asked Dr. Saunders, when a few minutes later he came out of the chamber.

Before Mrs. Mowry could give voice to a denial, Mr. Broome exclaimed: "Yes; a wife."

"Wife, did you say? Where is she?" demanded Mrs. Mowry in skeptical amazement.

Broome pointed a significant finger towards the door, where Ethel, her eyes strained wide, and with dry, parted lips, had just hurriedly entered. Without waiting for Mrs. Mowry's gasping reply, Dr. Reichenbach threw wide the chamber door and then softly closed it, after Ethel had swiftly crossed the threshold.

Her husband lay upon the bed, his eyes closed as if in sleep, but upon his face was the stamp of death. At the sight of this strong man laid so low, a sobbing cry broke from her. At the sound Mr. Burton opened his eyes, and when he beheld his wife, with piteously clasped hands leaning against the door, an evil smile distorted the dark beauty of his countenance.

"I'm done for," he said, shortly. "Now, don't bother wasting your breath by saying that you're sorry," he added harshly; "I know you're not."

Ethel drew herself up like one who felt the lash of a whip, and the pity that was melting her heart turned and froze her blood to ice.

When he saw the effect of his words he laughed in cruel delight, then he wearily closed his eyes.

She put her hand on the knob of the door to leave this man who, in the grasp of death doubted and repulsed her. But as she caught sight of the haggard face on the pillow, a wave of self-accusation swept over her at such a cowardly desertion of her helpless, dying husband. His jeering laugh had power to cut her—had cut her many times—too many times she thought in a quick agony of contrition—and with a cry of remorse she flung herself upon her knees by the bed and burst into a passion of tears.

He opened his eyes, blankly at first then incredulously. After a moment's stare at her he whispered: "Then you do care?"

"Why should I not care?" she sobbed wildly. "Is this, then, to be the end of our compact? A broken, miserable life, when we started out to be so happy!"

"Oh!" was his bitter exclamation. "I understand," and he turned his face away from her.

"If I only had been less proud, more yielding, we might have been happy," moaned Ethel.

"Yes, if you only had been," agreed the man who knew in his heart that with the right treatment never a softer, sweeter woman drew breath than the one kneeling beside him in an agony of contrition.

"If I had only been a better woman, you would have been a better man."

"Yes," answered he to her whose honor he deemed impregnable. "Do you know how I met with this accident?" he sneered.

"Louise told me that you fell off the platform. You might not have been here to-day if I had not been here.

Oh, I intended to return to you," she cried, as she smote her forehead in her utter dejection.

"So that the world could at last see that you were not a failure as a wife?"

At this cruel taunt from a man upon whom the death agony was breaking in drops across his pain-furrowed brow, Ethel's sobs caught in her throat with a stifling feeling of suffocation, and she stared at the gaudy silk coverlet which seemed suddenly to thrust itself upon her vision and remind her of one happy day, not long ago, when she and Louise had finished it out in the sunshine beneath the blue sky, where the air was fresh. Oh, the fresh air—she tried to put her hands to her throat—where there were no signs of death, nor voices calling her name and telling her that he was bad, bad, bad—that he was born bad! And Lillie, too, was calling!

At the sound of her child's voice Ethel strove to regain her senses, but a sudden darkness swept over her, and she fell forward, her face buried in the coverlet in merciful unconsciousness.

It was the voice of Lillie who had just entered the room and flung her arms about her dear papa's neck. "I knew you were here, even before Aunt Louise told me," she triumphantly exclaimed. "I knew by this." She held out the treasured picture in the silver frame.

He looked from the picture he had presented to Louise to the lifeless form of his wife, and whispered fearfully: "Throw it aside, dear. Like a good little girl hand your father that medicine the doctor left on the table."

"They didn't tell me you were so sick." All the joy had died out of her voice.

"It's your mother who is sick," he said, hastily.

"Goosie!" laughed the child, somewhat reassured at the change the medicine had made in her father's pale face. "Mamma's praying. Almost every night she prays like that, on her knees, with her face buried in her hands."

"Can you pray?" came the hesitating question.

The child nodded. "God bless papa—"

"First put your arms around my neck," came the rapid interruption, "with your face against mine, and listen attentively to what I have to say. Tell your mother, not to-day, nor to-morrow, but some day, tell her that she was the only woman in the world I ever loved. Don't forget, child—the only woman in the world I ever loved. But not even her love"—he stretched out his hand and stroked Ethel's silken hair—"could make me a good man." He put his arms about the child's neck, drew her to him once again and kissed her twice—once for herself and once for her mother—then he said, in a voice that was scarcely audible: "Now pray."

"Now I lay me down to sleep," began Lillie.

Her father sank back upon the pillows and closed his eyes.

"I pray to God my soul to keep—"

"My soul to keep," he repeated.

"If I should die before I wake,

I pray to God my soul to take."

"My soul to take," he whispered, and then became silent.

On the bed between her parents the child sat patiently in the quiet room, and dared not make a sound for fear she might disturb her mother's prayers and her father's peaceful slumbers.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### SOUTHERN BLOOD

OUTSIDE the chamber Mrs. Mowry paced restlessly up and down the long, narrow entry in ill-concealed resentment against the humiliation that had been thrust upon her. It was almost past belief that she, the hostess, who had times without number entertained Mr. Blumenberg, should be forced to stand aside and see an interloper take the place of honor by his side. It is true that Mrs. Mowry had made a determined effort to enter the room when Lillie had been so readily admitted. However, she had been politely but firmly refused by Dr. Reichenbach, who, for some unaccountable reason, had constituted himself custodian of the chamber door.

At last the prolonged silence within the chamber, together with the Doctor's serene indifference to her just indignation, became so unbearable that the angry woman forsook the narrow limits of the entry for the freer, wider space of the piazza.


Mr. Broome had just returned from an anxious search of the deserted road and was standing on the piazza steps in doubt as to which direction he should turn to continue his search, when Mrs. Mowry bore down upon him—as he afterwards expressed it—like an animated cyclone, and exclaimed in a voice sharp as the crack of a whip:

"I have been stung by an adder."

Mr. Broome jumped involuntarily.

The woman, too enraged to realize that she was using a figure of speech, rapidly went on to say: "Yes, by a woman who is beholden to me for food and shelter."

"You don't mean Mrs. Burton, do you?" asked her puzzled listener.



"Who else do you think I could mean?" retorted Mrs. Mowry, her pent-up anger bursting forth almost in a fury. "That woman who didn't have a place to go until I took her and her child. Don't you think as a slight show of gratitude she might have kept her place?"

Mr. Broome held out his hands in earnest appeal. "Surely you will admit that a woman's place is by the bedside of her injured husband."

"Bosh!" snapped the irate lady with an emphatic stamp of her foot. "How do you know he is her husband?"

"She said so."

This answer of simple conviction was met by a derisive laugh. "Yes, and manlike, because she's pretty, you believe every word she says."

"I admit she is pretty—very pretty—but notwithstanding this serious drawback to her veracity," replied Broome, with elaborate sarcasm, "I happen to know she told the truth."

"Then, pray, why does she not bear his name?" rang out the triumphant question.

"His name is Burton."

"His name is Blumenberg," was the prompt contradiction. "He told me so, and he is a gentleman," added Blumenberg's defender with a crushing distinct accent on the pronoun.

"He is a liar and a thief!"

Mrs. Mowry stood for a moment as if turned to stone when she heard a nobleman called not only a liar, but a thief. Then she drew a long breath and said to the audacious accuser:

"You are a spy, and if you were paid enough you would cheerfully blacken the reputation of a saint."

"You are at liberty, madam, to think a detective is a spy," was the quiet rejoinder, "and I certainly was paid to look up this man Burton. But allow me to say that there was not much chance for me to blacken his reputation—had I been so disposed—for the man himself had saved me the trouble. It was pretty well smooched before I met him."



Mr. Broome had walked up on the piazza and stood leaning against one of the pillars. "He is what men call a bad pill. In the South, where he was born and where he was married, and where he made a showy but precarious and oftentimes a dishonest living, he finally got into a gambling scrape and was forced to leave that part of the country. He deserted his wife and child—the very same—" eagerly explained the detective, as Mrs. Mowry's glance sought the house. "He left his wife and child with less disposition than you would a stray cur. He eventually drifted up North, and the first I heard of him was when he tried to get money on a forged check. I shadowed and followed him to Wrentham, but I am sorry to say," said Broome, grimly, "that just when I thought I had him he escaped me by your giving him a ride—"

"I gave him a ride?" interrupted his listener, starting forward in the chair where she had sunk at the beginning of the story.

"Surely you haven't forgotten that ride," began Broome, with insinuating sweetness, "when you lost your hearing—"

Mrs. Mowry sunk back soderly in her chair, her fingers clenching the ear-trumpet in her hand.

"And I a horse," continued the detective. "That horse," he continued, regretfully, "cost me a hundred and fifty dollars. It was but a short time after when this man introduced himself to you as Conrad Blumentberg. Oh, he has the gift of gab and a handsome presence, and it was a simple matter to pass himself off as a foreign nobleman."

"His credentials," faltered Mrs. Mowry.

"Were forged," calmly replied Broome. "While paying his addresses to your daughter, whom he believed at first to be an heiress, he quite accidentally learned of Pythias Prince and his inheritance of \$20,000."

"Pythias Prince heir to \$20,000?"

"Well, of course, it is not certain, but if Burton had his way, Pythias Prince would never get a cent of it. Through a friend in Hawkins Brothers' office, this genneel crook

worked up a scheme to have the money sent to him. Instead, it came to Damon Adams, the lawyer. The baffled man, on his way from this very house where you had been entertaining him, waylays Mr. Adams—your dearest friend—and tries to rob him of the money. But he found his match in skill if not in strength. In the scuffle he dropped his false beard and one of his John King pistols. Later, he again tried to get the money by making one of his dupes, a New Orleans sailor boy, impersonate Pythias Prince—”

“Why did you not tell me all this before?” broke in his listener, with asperity.

“Because not until this morning was I sure that Blumenberg was the man. The picture I found in your parlor was the missing clue. Mrs. Burton, when she saw the picture, told me it was that of her husband.”

“Why did she not denounce him to us?” asked Mrs. Mowry in sudden anger.

“Is it likely she would suspect that her reprobate husband and—pardon me, madam—your grand nobleman were one and the same man?”

Stung into fierce resistance by what she chose to think was a cruel taunt, the disappointed woman cried: “I don’t believe what you say. His word is as good as yours.”

“Better, according to your judgment,” agreed the detective.

“I want proofs.”

“You’ll get them quick enough,” was his grim rejoinder, as a tall, gaunt woman in rusty black stole round from the back of the house up to the piazza.

“What do you want?” cried the startled Mrs. Mowry, as the woman made for the door.

“Charles Burton.”

“There is no such man here,” was the stubborn reply, as Mrs. Mowry rose quickly to her feet.

“He is here,” calmly contradicted the stranger, “and I am going to see him. “I want to look again upon his set, white face, drawn and twisted in agony,” she chuckled.

"What do you know about him?" asked the astonished woman.

"Enough to hang him."

"Take care," warned Mrs. Mowry, with a contemptuous look at the woman's dusty clothes; "hang is a bad word."

"He is a bad man."

"What did he ever do to you?" asked her adversary in high disdain.

"What did he do to me?" was the fierce reply. "What did he not do to me? He wanted to marry your daughter, did he?" She laughed shrilly. "He makes a specialty of marrying young and beautiful girls. They don't live long—"

Mrs. Mowry turned pale.

"Oh, he doesn't kill them with a knife or a pistol—that's too quick work—and besides it might prove dangerous to him." Suddenly she drew near to Mrs. Mowry, and in a voice that rose almost to a wail she asked: "Oh, woman, woman, is that why you nurtured your tender lamb to throw her finally to a wolf?"

"The woman is mad!" Mrs. Mowry started back in terror and her beseeching look sought Broome, but in vain.

"Not too mad to read the look of terror in your daughter's eyes. I met her down beneath yonder trees, when I tried to cheer her weary heart with words of hope. Poor child, poor child, to have to draw consolation from a pack of cards instead of finding it on her mother's breast."

"Take her away!" almost shrieked Mrs. Mowry to Broome, who had withdrawn to one side of the piazza and calmly watched the scene.

"Not before I reach him! He murdered one daughter. I'll put him out of the way before he kills my other child."

For a moment Mrs. Mowry hid her face in her hands as the woman, her face livid with hate, sprang towards the door. Then a stern determination took possession of Mrs. Mowry. She, too, moved, and together they crossed the threshold and passed into the hallway. Then the strange

woman was obliged to let Mrs. Mowry take the lead, for she did not know in which room the object of her hate could be found.

The door was thrown open and both saw the picture revealed to them. Across the foot of the bed was the prostrate form of Ethel. With her arms about her father's neck, Lillie was trying to win a word of endearment from lips that were closed forever. Both women gazed upon the face of the dead man. One saw that all her hopes had been defeated, while the other knew that her vengeance was complete.

## CHAPTER XXX

### A HAPPY HOME

IN the Hooper Smith flat on Thanksgiving morning there was bustle and excitement, from the kitchen, where Minerva was preparing dinner, to the dining-room, where Hooper was endeavoring to set the table. Early that morning Minerva had said, with airy grace, to her husband: "I will be queen of the kitchen, and you shall be king of the dining-room."

In Hooper's year of married life he had learned many things he had not known before. One of these was keeping silent at the right time; therefore, he did not dispute the title which was suddenly thrust upon him, nor, what is more to the point, did he basely abdicate. But on one of Minerva's hurried trips to the dining-room, he asked, with a look of apprehension at the array of china he was supposed to artistically place upon the table:

"Why did you send Aunt Jane away on this momentous occasion?"

"Don't be silly," rebuked Minerva, from the depths of the dining-room closet. "I sent her and Uncle Jim after Aunt Mowry."

"Yes, you did," was the derisive answer. "I hope, Minnie, you are not trying to make me think that Mrs. Mowry needs help," he protested, the picture of that erect lady striding across his mind's eye, as it were, to emphatically disprove the libel. "Why couldn't her son-in-law take charge of her?"

Minerva's face lighted up with satisfaction. "Oh, I am so glad they are married at last. Doesn't Louise look happy since she became Mrs. Pythias Prince? She was

always pretty, but within the last few months she has become a positive beauty."

"There are others," quickly responded Hooper, with a look of pride at his own bonny wife.

She smiled at his frank praise and a moment after whispered, confidentially: "If you want to know the truth, I sent Aunt Jane away because I wanted folks to see what a nice dinner I could get up all by myself, for I can cook a good dinner, can't I?"

"Can you?" enthusiastically echoed her better-half, smacking his lips in delight. "I should say you could!" Carried away by the thought of the good cheer he had been blessed with in his married life, he forsook his post of duty at the table and enfolded Minerva in a joyful hug.

"You will never get the table set at this rate," came her laughing protest, as she shook herself free from his embrace. "Now be sure to get the tablecloth on straight; there's a good boy," she coaxed, as she suddenly disappeared into the kitchen, from where, when she opened the door, came an appetizing odor of—what seemed to Hooper every vegetable he had ever known.

A short time after, when Minerva returned from the kitchen, on a quick tour of investigation, she paused in the doorway with a cry of: "Goodness, Hooper! Can't you count? You've only got twelve plates on the table."

"Oh, yes, I am one short," began Hooper, in some confusion, "but thirteen is an unlucky number. I thought, perhaps, one might not come."

"Heaven forbid!" fervently ejaculated the queen of the kitchen. "Not with all the food I have in here," she added, darting into the kitchen to inspect her oven.

Five minutes later, Minerva, becoming suspicious at the silence in the dining-room, paid another hurried visit there. "Oh, Hooper," she cried, almost in despair, "you've got fourteen plates on now."

"I thought someone might drop in—and don't you think it's just as well to be prepared for the unexpected guest? Kind of hospitable, you know."

Minnie gave a nervous look at the clock, which was fast ticking on towards noon. "If you are as superstitious as all that—"

"Well, you know what thirteen at table is a sign of," was the dejected answer. "Minnie, if I thought I'd lose you—"

"Lose me!" was the exasperated interruption. She held out her plump, white arms that were bared to her dimpled elbows. "Do I look as if I was fading away?" She laughed in spite of herself. "I simply could not leave anyone out," she went on to explain, "seeing that it is to be a reunion. Never mind, dear," she added, with a quick change of tone. "If you don't want thirteen at the table, set it for twelve, and I'll manage it somehow."

And managed it was without any trouble, for just as Minerva was going to put the finishing touches on the table, Albert appeared with a note from Mr. Broome, stating that on account of a hurry call that morning he could not be with them until late in the afternoon. With the note came a box of fluffy, long-stemmed chrysanthemums, a mute apology for the donor's absence.

As Minerva deftly arranged the flowers in a tall, crystal vase, she told Albert, with charming hospitality, to make himself at home. Albert immediately proceeded to do so by helping himself from a large platter of crisp, newly-baked cookies, near which he had stationed himself with no apparent self-interest. The new brown plaid suit—Mr. Broome's Christmas present in advance—may have enveloped Mr. Adams' errand boy, but its splendor had not subdued him, as the rapid disappearance of six cookies could bear ample testimony.

"Why, child," cried his astonished hostess, "you won't have any appetite left for dinner."

"Plenty more room," was Albert's calm assurance, his hand on the seventh cookie. It was only the opportune arrival of the guests that made the boy desert the kitchen for the more potent charms of Lillie, who at once insisted that Albert should sit beside her at the table.

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And such a table! The array of glistening damask, delicate china, and sparkling cut glass, together with the gorgeous chrysanthemums rising high in the centre, was a sight that brought forth cries of approbation from her cold and hungry guests. It was a jolly party that seated themselves at the table, from Hooper, at one end, behind the large, well-browned turkey, to Minerva at the other end, where, with a smile born of perfect faith in her culinary achievement, she sat looking—as Aunt Jane proudly declared—pretty enough to eat.

When, near the close of the dinner, there came a momentary quiet in the laughter and fun, Damon arose and announced that he was about to take Hooper into partnership with him, a cheer went up for their lucky host.

"Then it's time to move from this pokey flat," cried Uncle Jim, when Damon had resumed his seat.

"What!" exclaimed the dismayed Minerva, looking lovingly about at her neat, comfortable little home.

"Pokey it is," chimed in Aunt Jane. "Not room enough to turn around in. You want a farm."

"Oh, yes," agreed Minerva, yearningly, "and a horse and carriage."

"They grow on trees," broke in Hooper, facetiously.

"They grow in my pocket-book," declared Uncle Jim, stoutly. "I have been thinking for a long time of buying you a home in the country. Minerva belongs on a farm."

"Oh!" came a gasp of delight from that young lady.

"Beware of the sin of covetousness," warned her husband in a vain effort to hide his own feelings.

"So do your Aunt and I belong on a farm," continued Uncle Jim. "In fact, we've about lived with you and Minnie since you've been married."

"You're welcome, always welcome," affirmed Hooper, his face flushed with emotion.

"Thank you," answered Uncle Jim, simply. "Then we might as well end our days with you. The farm shall be Minerva's. As for Louise," and he turned to his other



niece who sat beside him, and affectionately placed his hand on her shoulder, "when I am dead she is to have the bulk of my property. Oh, I am not going to die yet awhile, I hope," he exclaimed, at a gesture of protest from Louise. "Indeed, miss," he continued, jovially chucking her under the chin, "if your husband keeps on enlarging his practice at the rate he has been, you won't need my money or anybody else's."

"Pythias has become a wonderful favorite in our neighborhood," proudly whispered Mrs. Mowry to Ethel's mother.

But Mrs. Tyler remained silent, her gaze fastened in glad content upon her daughter, who, for the first time in a year, was dressed in white.

Ethel, catching the look from across the table, smiled reassuringly back at her mother. One would scarcely believe that this peaceful looking woman in the soft lavender dress, who sat so quietly among the merry guests, was the haggard, half-demented creature that had forced herself among them more than a year ago. But happiness is a great beautifier. Even the stern Mrs. Mowry had been known to admit that Mrs. Tyler's presence among them had greatly added to the brightness of their little circle. Indeed, Mrs. Mowry had so far humbled her pride as to apologize to Mrs. Tyler for her unkind words which she had spoken on the piazza the day of Conrad Blumenberg's death—for Mrs. Mowry would never call him by any other name; in fact, she had gone farther than to apologize—she had declared that he was better dead.

Time had worked great improvement also in Ethel; or, perhaps, it was the soft, clinging white dress she wore that made her look so lovely. At her waist was a bunch of violets. This was her only ornament, unless one excepts the flush on her cheeks and the unusual brilliancy of her eyes.

"No, no," she said to Lillie's whispered appeal, as they rose from the table. "I must help wash the dishes; perhaps grandma will."

"Will you, grandma," coaxed Lillie, drawing herself up on tiptoe in her endeavor to reach that lady's ear, "tell me a story?"

"Yes, dear, yes," answered her grandmother, drawing the child with her down onto the long seat in the bow window.

Ethel, thus relieved of that task, went into the kitchen, where she was promptly told by Louise and Minerva that she was not needed.

"We promised to clear off the table. We don't need you," cried Aunt Jane and Mrs. Mowry with one accord.

For a moment Ethel stood irresolutely in the middle of the room. "Nobody needs me," she said.

"Come with us into my den," suggested Hooper.

"To watch you smoke cigarettes," said Uncle Jim, with a look of disgust.

"I never smoke more than one at a time," corrected Hooper cheerfully, "and they are no worse than your old pipe, or Pythias' cheap cigars," chaffed Hooper.

Ethel laughed and went into the parlor.

"Won't you join us?" said Pythias to Damon

Damon shook his head in refusal.

In the meantime, Albert, with the pockets of his new suit bulging with a varied assortment of candy, nuts, raisins, and oranges, ensconced himself in the bow window near Lillie, where he condescended to listen to the story when he found out it was about a little boy. His name was Paul Dombey and the story seemed especially fine to Lillie because it was taken out of a grown-up book that her grandmother had read. When it came to the part where Paul died, Lillie's lips began to quiver, suspiciously, so her grandmother hastened to say:

"Oh, but he went to Heaven, where his dear mother was."

"How do you know she was in Heaven?" spoke up Albert.

"Why, where would she be?" asked Mrs. Tyler, in some bewilderment.

Albert solemnly pointed one finger downward.

"She was a good woman."

"She may have been bad when she was a little girl," said Albert with conviction.

"No, she was always good," said Mrs. Tyler, firmly, "and so was Paul."

"He wasn't big enough to be bad," declared the young skeptic.

"He was as big as you," came Mrs. Tyler's pointed remark.

"He was too sick to go out and play with bad boys," and Albert began to peel an orange with the air of one to whom the argument was closed.

Damon had followed Ethel into the parlor where she was standing by the window with a book in her hand.

"And constancy lies in realms above."

Damon read over her shoulder. "That is not so," he remarked, quietly.

"No," she softly replied, with an involuntary glance at the flowers in her belt.

"Just now I heard you say nobody needed you," he said, his hand on hers. "I came in here to tell you somebody does need you and pretty badly."

"I thought you had forgotten," faltered Ethel; her lips trembling. "So I put on the white dress."

"Forgotten!" he cried, her hand crushed against the tumult in his breast. "Does the sun forget to shine? No, I simply waited, dearest, for you to forget other things. At times this year of waiting has been a torture to me," he cried, bitterly. "To see you earning your living, and I—I with more money than I know what to do with! We will be married next week."

"Oh, no."

"Oh, yes."

"Mother and Lillie," began Ethel.

"Shall be well taken care of with us. Ethel, will you ever cease to forget the cares of others?" he protested, passionately. Hereafter you shall have no cares, for you are

mine, mine!" He held her at arms length then drew her to him tenderly. Within the shelter of his arms, Ethel let her weary head sink on his shoulder in tired content, and with tears in her eyes she thanked God for the protection of this good man to whom she had never dared to show all the love for him that was in her heart.

When they joined the merry group in the dining-room a faint flush of gratification stole over the face of Ethel's mother, as she beheld them enter hand in hand.

"Over the nuts and coffee we have been telling stories," remarked the belated but ever jovial Mr. Broome. "The story of our own lives may not be a strange one, but let us hope it will be a happy one," he added, with a knowing and kindly look at Damon and Ethel. "Our story is not of the high and mighty, nor of the poor and lowly. We belong to what may be called the middle class of American society. And, after all, are we not better exemplars of the simple life than those who are above or below us?"

THE END.











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